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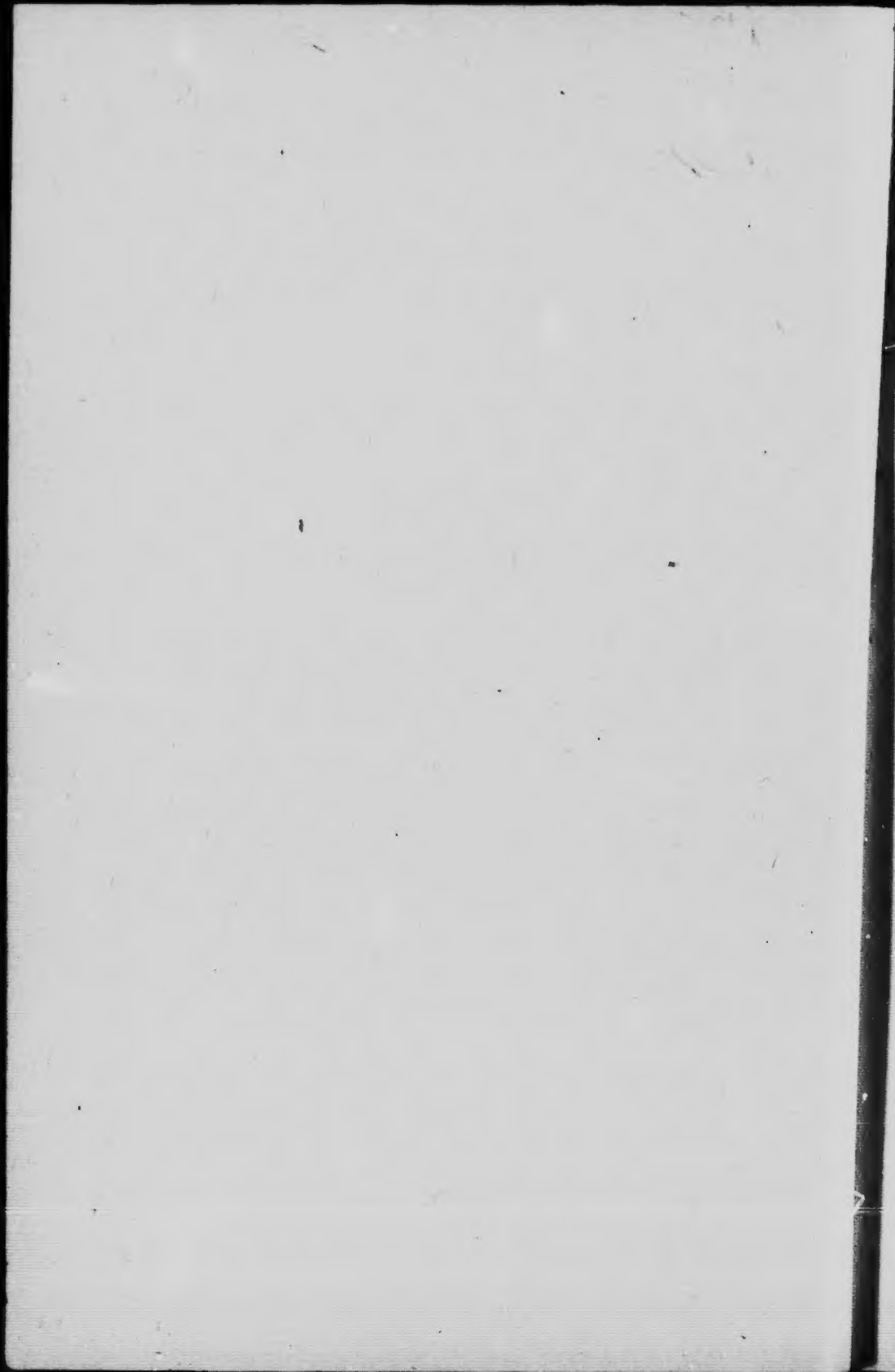
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THE COMING



The
COMING

BY

J. C. SNAITH

AUTHOR OF "THE SAILOR," "ANNE FEVERSHAM," ETC.

THOMAS LANGTON

TORONTO

1917

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THE COMING

I

He came to his own and his own knew him not.

THE vicar of the parish sat at his study table pen in hand, a sheet of paper before him. It was Saturday morning already and his weekly sermon was not yet begun. On Sundays, at the forenoon service, it was Mr. Perry-Hennington's custom to read an old discourse, but in the evening the rigid practice of nearly forty years required that he should give to the world a new and original homily.

To a man of the vicar's mold this was a fairly simple matter. His rustic flock was not in the least critical. To the villagers of Penfold, a hamlet on the borders of Sussex and Kent, every word of their pastor was gospel. And in their pastor's own gravely deliberate words it was the gospel of Christ Crucified.

There had been a time in the vicar's life when his task had sat lightly upon him. Given the family living of Penfold-with-Churley in October, 1879, the Rev-

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erend the Honorable Thomas Perry-Hennington had never really had any trouble in the matter until August, 1914. And then, all at once, trouble came so heavily upon a man no longer young, that from about the time of the retreat from Mons Saturday morning became a symbol of torment. It was then that a dark specter first appeared in the vicar's mind. For thirty-five years he had been modestly content with a simple moral obligation in return for a stipend of eight hundred pounds a year. He had never presumed to question the fitness of a man with an Oxford pass degree for such a relatively humble office. A Christian of the old sort, with the habit of faith, and in his own phrase "without intellectual smear," he had always been on terms with God. And though Mr. Perry-Hennington would have been the last to claim Him as a tribal deity, in the vicar's ear He undoubtedly spoke with the accent of an English public school, and used the language of Dr. Pusey and Dr. Westcott. But somehow August, 1914, had seemed to change everything.

It was now June of the following year and Saturday morning had grown into a nightmare for the vicar. Doubt had arisen in the household of faith, a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but only a firm will and a stout heart had been able to dispel it. Terrible wrong had been done to an easy and pleasant world and God

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had seemed to look on. Moreover it had been boldly claimed that not only was he a graduate of a foreign university, but that he had justified the ways of Antichrist.

After grave and bitter searchings of heart, Mr. Perry-Hennington had risen, not only in the pulpit but in the public press, to rebut the charge. But this morning, seated in a charming room, holding the end of a pen, a humbler, more personal doubt in his mind. Was it a man's work to be devoting one's energies to the duties of a parish priest? Was it a man's work to be addressing a few yokels, for the most part women and old men? As far as Penfold-with-Churley was concerned Armageddon might have been ages away. In fact Mr. Perry-Hennington had recently written a letter to his favorite newspaper in very good English to say so.

For the tenth time that morning the vicar dipped his pen in the ink. For the tenth time it hung lifeless, a thing without words, above a page thirsting to receive them. For the tenth time the ink grew dry. With a faint sigh, which in one less strong of will would have been despair, he suddenly lifted his eyes to look through the window.

The room faced south. Sussex was spread before him like a carpet. Fold upon fold, hill beyond hill, it

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flowed in curves of inconceivable harmony to meet the distant sea. To the right a subtle thickening of sunlight marked the ancient forest of Ashdown; straight ahead was Crowborough Beacon; far away to the left were dark masses of gorse, masking the delicate verdure of the weald of Kent. There was not a cloud in the sky. The sun of June, a generous, living warmth, was everywhere. But as the vicar gazed solemnly out of the window he had not a thought for the enchantment of the scene.

Suddenly he rose a little impatiently and opened the window still wider. If he was to do his duty on the morrow he must have more light, more air. A grizzled head was flung forth to meet the strong, keen sun, to snuff the magic air. A clean wind racing by made his lips and eyelids tingle, and then, all at once, he remembered his boy on the *Poseidon*.

But he must put the *Poseidon* out of his mind if he was to do his pastoral duty on the morrow. Before he could draw in his head and buckle to his task, an odd whirr of sound, curiously sharp and loud, came on his ear. There was an airplane somewhere. Involuntarily he shaded his eyes to look. Yes, there she was! What speed, what grace, what incomparable power in the live, sentient thing! How feat she looked, how noble,

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as she rode the blue like some fabled roc of an eastern story.

"Off to France," said the vicar. He took off his spectacles and wiped them, and then put them on again.

But the morrow's sermon was again forgotten. He had remembered his boy in the air. The graceless lad whom he had flogged more than once in that very room, who had done little good at Marlborough, who had preferred a stool in a stockbroker's office to the University, was now a superman, a veritable god in a machine. A week ago he had been to Buckingham Palace to be decorated by the King for an act of incredible daring. His name was great in the hearts of his countrymen. This lad not yet twenty, whom wild horses would not have dragged through the fourth *Æneid*, had made the name of Perry-Hennington ring throughout the empire.

From this amazing Charley in his biplane, it was only a step in the father's mind to honest Dick and the wardroom of the *Poseidon*. The vicar recalled with a little thrill of pride how Dick's grandfather, the admiral, had always said that the boy was "a thorough Hennington," the highest compliment the stout old sea dog had it in his power to pay him or any other human being. And then from Dick with his wide blue eyes, his square, fighting face and his nerves of steel the

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thoughts of the father flew to Tom, his eldest boy, the high-strung, nervous fellow, the Trinity prize man with the first-class brain. Tom had left not only a lucrative practice and brilliant prospects at the Bar, but also a delicate wife and three young children in order to spend the winter in the trenches of the Ypres salient. Moreover, he had "stuck it" without a murmur of complaint, although he was far too exact a thinker ever to have had any illusions in regard to the nature of war, and although this particular war defied the human imagination to conceive its horror.

Yes, after all, Tom was the most wonderful of the three. Nature had not meant him for a soldier, the hypersensitive, overstrung lad who would faint over a cut finger, who had loathed cricket and football, or anything violent, who in years of manhood had had an almost fanatical distrust of the military mind. Some special grace had helped him to endure the bestiality of Flanders.

From the thought of the three splendid sons God had given him the mind of the vicar turned to their begetter. He was only just sixty, he enjoyed rude health except for a touch of rheumatism now and again, yet here he was in a Sussex village supervising parish matters and preaching to women and old men.

At last, with a jerk of impatience that was half

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despair, he suddenly withdrew his head from the intoxicating sun, the cool, scented wind of early June. "I'll see the Bishop, that's what I'll do," he muttered as he did so.

But as he sat down once more at his writing table before the accusing page, he remembered that he had seen the Bishop several times already. And the Bishop's counsel had been ever the same. Let him do the duty next him. His place was with his flock. Let him labor in his vocation, the only work for which one of his sort was really qualified.

Bitterly this soldier of God regretted now that he had not chosen in his youth the other branch of his profession. Man of sixty as he was, there were times when he burned to be with his three boys in the fight. His own father, a fine old Crimean warrior, had once given him the choice of Sandhurst or Oxford, and the vicar was now constrained to believe that he had chosen the lesser part. By this time he might have been on the General Headquarters Staff, whereas he was not even permitted to wear the uniform of the true Church Militant.

At last with a groan of vexation the vicar dipped his pen again. And then something happened. Without conscious volition, or overt process of the mind, the pen began to move across the page. Slowly it

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traced a succession of words, whose purport he didn't grasp until an eye had been passed over them. "Let us cast off the works of darkness, let us put on the armor of light."

Sensible at once of high inspiration he took a vital force from the idea. It began to unseal faculties latent within him. His thoughts came to a point at last, they grew consecutive, he could see his way, his mind took wings. And then suddenly, alas, before he could lay pen to paper, there came a very unfortunate interruption.

II

THERE was a knock on the study door.
"Come in," called the vicar rather sharply.
The whole household knew that on Sunday morning those precincts were inviolable.

His daughter Edith came hurriedly into the room. A tall, thin, eager-looking girl, her large features and hook nose were absurdly like her father's. Nobody called her handsome, yet in bearing and movement was the lithe grace the world looks for in a clean-run strain. But lines of ill-health were in the sensitive face, and the honest, rather near-sighted eyes had a look of tension and perplexity. An only girl, in a country parsonage, thrown much upon herself, the war had begun to tell its tale. Intensely proud that her brothers were in it, she could think of nothing else. Their deeds, hazards, sacrifices were taken for granted as far as others could guess, but they filled her with secret disgust for her own limited activities. Limited they must remain for some little time to come. It had been Edith's wish to go to Serbia with her cousin's Red Cross unit. And in spite of the strong views of

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her doctor she would have done so but for a sharp attack of illness. That had been three months ago. She was not yet strong enough for regular work in a hospital or a munition factory, but as an active member of a woman's volunteer training corps, she faithfully performed certain local and promiscuous duties.

There was one duty, however, which Edith in her zeal had lately imposed upon herself. Or it may have been imposed upon her by that section of the English press from which she took her opinions. For the past three Saturday mornings it had been carried out religiously. Known as "rounding up the shirkers," it consisted in making a tour of the neighboring villages on a bicycle, and in presenting a white feather to male members of the population of military age who were not in khaki.

The girl had just returned from the fulfillment of the weekly task. She was in a state of excitement slightly tinged with hysteria, and that alone was her excuse for entering that room at such a time.

At first the vicar was more concerned by her actual presence than for the state of her feelings.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded impatiently, without looking up from his sermon.

"I'm so sorry to disturb you, father"—the high-

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pitched voice had a curious quiver in it—"but something *rather* disagreeable has happened. I felt that I must come and tell you."

The vicar swung slowly round in his chair. He was an obtuse man, therefore the girl's excitement was still lost upon him, but he had a fixed habit of duty. If the matter was really disagreeable he was prepared to deal with it at once; if it admitted of qualification it must wait until after luncheon.

There was no doubt, however, in Edith's mind that it called for her father's immediate attention. Moreover, the fact was at last made clear to him by a mounting color, and an air of growing agitation.

"Well, what's the matter?" A certain rough kindness came into the vicar's tone as soon as these facts were borne in upon him. "I hope you've not been overtaxing yourself. Joliffe said you would have to be very careful for some time."

The attempt of a somewhat emotional voice to reassure him on that point was not altogether a success.

"Then what is the matter?" The vicar peered at her solemnly over his spectacles.

Edith hesitated.

The vicar mobilized an impatient eyebrow.

"It's—it's only that wretched man, John Smith."

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Mr. Perry-Hennington gave a little start of annoyance at the mention of the name.

"He's quite upset me."

"What's he been doing now?" The vicar's tone was an odd mingling of scorn and curiosity.

"It's foolish to let a man of that kind upset one," said Edith rather evasively.

"I agree. But tell me——?"

"It will only annoy you." Filial regard and outraged feelings had begun a pitched battle. "It's merely weak to be worried by that kind of creature."

"My dear girl"—the tone was very stern—"tell me in just two words what has happened." And the vicar laid down his pen and sat back in his chair.

"I have been insulted." Edith made heroic fight but the sense of outrage was too much for her.

"How? In what way?" The county magistrate had begun to take a hand in the proceedings.

A little alarmed, Edith plunged into a narrative of events. "I had just one feather left on my return from Heathfield," she said, "and as I came across the Common there was John Smith loafing about as he so often is. So I went up to him and said: 'I should like to give you this.'"

A look of pained annoyance came into the vicar's face. "It may be right in principle," he said, "but the

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method doesn't appeal to me. And I warned you that something of this kind might happen."

"But he ought to be in the army. Or working at munitions."

"Maybe. Well, you gave him the feather. And what happened?"

"First of all he kissed it. Then he put it in his buttonhole, and struck a sort of attitude and said—let me give you his exact words—'And lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.'"

The vicar jumped up as if he had been stung. "The fellow said that! But that's blasphemy!"

"Exactly what I thought, father," said Edith in an extremely emotional voice. "I was simply horrified."

"Atrocious blasphemy!" Seething with indignation the vicar began to stride about the room. "This must be carried further," he said.

To the lay mind such an incident hardly called for serious notice, even on the part of the vicar of the parish whose function it was to notice all things seriously. But with a subtlety of malice that Mr. Perry-Hennington deeply resented it had searched out his weakness. For some little time now, John Smith had been a thorn in the pastoral cushion. Week by week this village wastrel was becoming a sorer problem.

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Although the man's outrageous speech was of a piece with the rest of his conduct, the vicar immediately felt that it had brought matters to a head. He had already foreseen that the mere presence in his parish of this young man would sooner or later force certain issues upon him. Let them now be raised. Mr. Perry-Hennington felt that he must now face them frankly and fearlessly, once and for all, in a severely practical way.

His imperious stridings added to Edith's alarm.

"Somehow, father," she ventured, "I don't *quite* think he meant it for blasphemy. After all he's hardly that kind of person."

"Then what do you suppose the fellow did mean?" barked the vicar.

"Well, you know that half crazy way of his. After all, he may not have meant anything in particular."

"Whatever his intention he had no right to use such words in such a connection. I am going to follow this matter up."

Edith made a second rather distressed attempt to clear John Smith; the look in her father's face was quite alarming.

But Mr. Perry-Hennington was not to be appeased. "Sooner or later there's bound to be serious trouble with the fellow. And this is an opportunity to come

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to grips with him. I will go now and hear what he has to say for himself and then I must very carefully consider the steps to be taken in a highly disagreeable matter."

Thereupon, with the resolution of one proud of the fact that action is his true sphere the vicar strode boldly to the hatstand in the hall.

III

AS Mr. Perry-Hennington surged through the vicarage gate in the direction of the village green, a rising tide of indignation swept the morrow's discourse completely out of his mind. This was indeed a pity. Much was going on around and its inner meanings were in themselves a sermon. Every bush was afire with God. The sun of June was upon gorse and heather; bees, birds, hedgerows, flowers, all were touched with magic; larks were hovering, sap was flowing in the leaves, nature in myriad aspects filled with color, energy and music the enchanted air. But none of these things spoke to the vicar. He was a man of wrath. Anger flamed within him as, head high-flung, he marched along a steep, bracken-fringed path, in quest of one whom he could no longer tolerate in his parish.

For some little time now, John Smith had been a trial. To begin with this young man was an alien presence in a well-disciplined flock. Had he been native-born, had his status and position been defined by historical precedent, Mr. Perry-Hennington would

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have been better able to deal with him. But, as he had complained rather bitterly, "John Smith was neither fish, flesh nor well-boiled fowl." There was no niche in the social hierarchy that he exactly fitted; there was no ground, except the insecure one of personal faith, upon which the vicar of the parish could engage him.

The cardinal fact in a most difficult case was that the young man's mother was living in Penfold. Moreover, she was the widow of a noncommissioned officer in a line regiment, who in the year 1886 had been killed in action in the service of his country. John, the only and posthumous child of an obscure soldier who had died in the desert, had been brought to Penfold by his mother as a boy of ten. There he had lived with her ever since in a tiny cottage on the edge of the common; there he had grown up, and as the vicar was sadly constrained to believe, into a free-thinker, a socialist and a generally undesirable person.

These were hard terms for Mr. Perry-Hennington to apply to anyone, but the conduct of the black sheep of the fold was now common talk, if not an open scandal. For one thing he was thought to be unsound on the war. He was known to hold cranky views on various subjects, and he had addressed meetings at Brombridge on the Universal Religion of Humanity

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or some kindred high-flown theme. Moreover, he talked freely with the young men of the neighborhood, among whom he was becoming a figure of influence. Indeed, it was said that the source of a kind of pacifist movement, faintly stirring up and down the district, could be traced to John Smith.

Far worse, however, than all this, he had lately acquired a reputation as a faith-healer. It was claimed for him by certain ignorant people at Grayfield and Oakshott that by means of Christian Science he had cured deafness, rheumatism and other minor ills to which the local flesh was heir. The vicar had been too impatient of the whole matter to investigate it. On the face of it the thing was quite absurd. In his eyes John Smith was hardly better than a yokel, although a man of superior education for his rank of life. Indeed, in Mr. Perry-Hennington's opinion, that was where the real root of the mischief lay. The mother, who was very poor, had contrived, by means of the needle, and by denying herself almost the necessities of life, to send the lad for several years to the grammar school at the neighboring town of Brombridge, where he had undoubtedly gained the rudiments of an education far in advance of any the village school had to offer. John had proved a boy of almost abnormal ability; and the high master of

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the grammar school had been sadly disappointed that he did not find his way to Oxford with a scholarship. Unfortunately the boy's health had always been delicate. He had suffered from epilepsy, and this fact, by forbidding a course of regular study, prevented a lad of great promise obtaining at an old university the mental discipline of which he was thought to stand in need.

The vicar considered it was this omission which had marred the boy's life. None of the learned professions was open to him; his education was both inadequate and irregular; moreover, the precarious state of his health forbade any form of permanent employment. Situations of a clerical kind had been found for him from time to time which he had been compelled to give up. Physically slight, he had never been fit for hard manual labor. Indeed, the only work with his hands for which he had shown any aptitude was at the carpenter's bench, and for some years now he had eked out his mother's slender means by assisting the village joiner.

The unfortunate part of the matter was, however, that the end was not here. Mentally, there could be no doubt, John Smith, a man now approaching thirty, was far beyond the level of the carpenter's bench. His mind, in the vicar's opinion, was deplorably ill-regulated, but in certain of its aspects he was ready to

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admit that it had both originality and power. The mother was a daughter of a Baptist minister in Wales, a fact which tended to raise her son beyond the level of his immediate surroundings; but that apart, the village carpenter's assistant had never yielded his boyish passion for books. He continued to read increasingly, books to test and search a vigorous mind. Moreover, he had an astonishing faculty of memory, and at times wrote poetry of a mystical, ultra-imaginative kind.

The case of John Smith was still further complicated for Mr. Perry-Hennington by the injudicious behavior of the local squire. Gervase Brandon, a cultivated, scholarly man, had encouraged this village ne'er-do-well in every possible way. There was reason to believe that he had helped the mother from time to time, and John, at any rate, had been given the freedom of the fine old library at Hart's Ghyll. There he could spend as many hours as he wished; therefrom he could borrow any volume that he chose, no matter how precious it might be; and in many delicate ways the well-meaning if over-generous squire, had played the part of Mæcenas.

In the vicar's opinion the inevitable sequel to Gervase Brandon's unwisdom had already occurred. A common goose had come to regard himself as a full-

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fledged swan. It was within the vicar's knowledge that from time to time John Smith had given expression to views which the ordinary layman could not hold with any sort of authority. Moreover, when remonstrated with, "this half-educated fellow" had always tried to stand his ground. And at the back of the vicar's mind still rankled a certain *mot* of John Smith's, duly reported by Samuel Veale the scandalized parish clerk. He had said that, as the world was constituted at present, the gospel according to the Reverend Thomas Perry-Hennington seemed of more importance than the gospel according to Jesus Christ.

When taxed with having made the statement to the village youth, John Smith did not deny the charge. He even showed a disposition to defend himself; and the vicar had felt obliged to end the interview by abruptly walking away. Some months had passed since that incident. But in his heart the vicar had not been able to forgive what he could only regard as a piece of effrontery. Henceforward all his dealings with John Smith were tainted by that recollection. The subject still rankled in his mind; indeed he would have been the first to own that it was impossible now for such a man as himself to consider the problem of John Smith without prejudice. Moreover, he was aware that an intense and growing personal resent-

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ment boded ill for the young man's future life in the parish of Penfold-with-Churley.

Sore, unhappy, yet braced with the stern delight that warriors feel, the vicar reached the common at last. That open, furze-clad plateau which divided Sussex from Kent and rose so sharply to the sky that it formed a natural altar upon which the priests of old had raised a stone was the favorite tryst of this village wastrel. As soon as Mr. Perry-Hennington came to the end of the steep path from the vicarage which debouched to the common, he shaded his eyes from the sun's glare. Straight before him, less than a hundred yards away, was the man he sought. John Smith was leaning against the stone.

The vicar took off his hat to cool his head a little, and then swung boldly across the turf. The young man, who was bareheaded and clad in common workaday clothes, looked clean and neat enough, but somehow strangely slight and frail. Gaunt of jaw and sunken-eyed, the face was of a very unusual kind, and from time to time was lit by a smile so vivid as to be unforgettable. But the outward aspect of John Smith had never had anything to say to the vicar, and this morning it had even less to say than usual.

For the vicar's attention had been caught by something else. Upon the young man's finger was perched

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a little, timid bird. He was cooing to it, in an odd, loving voice, and as the vicar came up he said: "Nay, nay, don't go. This good man will do you no harm."

But the bird appeared to feel otherwise. By the time the vicar was within ten yards it had flown away.

"Even the strong souls fear you, *sir*," said the young man with his swift smile, looking him frankly in the eyes.

"It is the first time one has heard such a grandiloquent term applied to a yellow-hammer," said the vicar coldly.

"Things are not always what they seem," said the young man. "The wisdom of countless ages is in that frail casket."

"Don't talk nonsense," said the vicar sharply.

"Many a saint, many a hero, is borne on the wings of a dove."

"Transcendental rubbish." The vicar mopped his face with his handkerchief, and then he began: "Smith"—he was too angry to use the man's Christian name—"my daughter tells me you have been blasphemous."

The young man, who still wore the white feather in his coat, looked at the angry vicar with an air of gentle surprise.

"Please don't deny it," said the vicar, taking silence

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for a desire to rebut the charge. "She has repeated to me word for word your mocking speech when you put that symbol of cowardice in your buttonhole."

John Smith looked at the vicar with his deep eyes and then he said slowly and softly: "If my words have hurt her I am very sorry."

This speech, in spite of its curious gentleness, added fuel to the vicar's anger.

"The humility you affect does not lessen their offense," he said sharply.

"Where lies the offense you speak of?" The question was asked simply, with a grave smile.

"If it is not clear to you," said the vicar with acid dignity, "it shall not be my part to explain it. I am not here to bandy words. Nor do I intend to chop logic. You consider yourself vastly clever, no doubt. But I have to warn you that the path you follow is full of peril."

"Yes, the path we are following is full of peril."

"Whom do you mean by 'we'?" said the vicar sternly.

"Mankind. All of us."

"That does not affect the question. Let us leave the general alone, let us keep to the particular."

"But how can we leave the general alone, how can

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we keep to the particular, when we are all members of one another?"

The vicar checked him with an imperious hand.

"Blasphemer," he said with growing passion, "how dare you parody the words of the Master?"

"No one can parody the words of the Master. Either they are or they are not."

"I am not here to argue with you. Understand, John Smith, that in all circumstances I decline to chop logic with—with a person of your sort."

It added to this young man's offense in the eyes of the vicar that he had presumed to address him as an intellectual equal. It was true that in a way of delicate irony, which even Mr. Perry-Hennington was not too dense to perceive, this extraordinary person deferred continually to the social and mental status of his questioner. It was the manner of one engaged in rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, but every word masked by the gentle voice was so subtly provocative that Mr. Perry-Hennington felt a secret humiliation in submitting to them. The implication made upon his mind was that the rôle of teacher and pupil had been reversed.

This unpleasant feeling was aggravated to the point of the unbearable by John Smith's next words.

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"Judge not," he said softly. "Once priests judged Jesus Christ."

The vicar recoiled.

"Abominable!" he said, and he clenched his fists as if he would strike him. "Blasphemer!"

The young man smiled sadly. "I only speak the truth," he said. "If it wounds you, sir, the fault is not mine."

Mr. Perry-Hennington made a stern effort to keep himself in hand. It was unseemly to bandy words with a man of this kind. Yet, as he belonged to the parish, the vicar in a sense was responsible for him; therefore it became his duty to find out what was at the back of his mind. Curbing as well as he could an indignation that threatened every moment to pass beyond control, he called upon John Smith to explain himself.

"You say you only speak the truth as it has been shown you. First I would ask whence it comes, and then I would ask how do you know it for the truth?"

"It has been communicated by the Father."

"Don't be so free with the name of God," said the vicar sternly. "And I, at any rate, take leave to doubt it."

"There is a voice I hear within me. And being divine it speaks only the truth."

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"How do you know it is divine?"

"How do I know the grass is green, the sky blue, the heather purple? How do I know the birds sing?"

"That is no answer," said the vicar. "It is open to anyone to claim a divine voice within did not modesty forbid."

The smile of John Smith was so sweetly simple that it could not have expressed an afterthought. "Had you a true vocation," he said, "would you find such uses for your modesty?"

The vicar, torn between a desire to rebuke what he felt to be an intolerable impertinence and a wish to end an interview that boded ill to his dignity, could only stand irresolute. Yet this odd creature spoke so readily, with a precision so rare and curious that his every word seemed to acquire a kind of authority. Bitterly chagrined, half insulted as the vicar was, he determined to continue the argument if only for the sake of a further light upon the man's state of mind.

"You claim to hear a divine voice. Is it for that reason, may one ask, that you feel licensed to utter such appalling blasphemies?"

John Smith smiled again in his odd way.

"You speak like the men of old time," he said softly.

"I use the King's English," said the vicar. "And

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I use it as pointedly, as expressively, as sincerely as lies in my power. I mean every word I say. You claim the divine voice, yet all that it speaks is profanity and corruption."

"As was said of the prophets of old?"

"You claim to be a prophet?"

"Yes, I claim to be a prophet."

"That is interesting." There was a sudden change of tone as the vicar realized the importance of the admission. He saw that it might have a very important bearing upon his future course of action. "You claim to be a prophet in order that you may blaspheme the Creator."

"I claim to be a prophet of the good, the beautiful, and the true. I claim to hear the voice of the eternal. And if these things be blasphemous in your sight, I can only grieve for your election."

"Leave me out of it, if you please." The clean thrust had stung the vicar to fury. "I know perfectly well where and how I stand, and if there is the slightest doubt in the matter it will be the province of my bishop to resolve it. But with you, Smith, who, I am ashamed to say, are one of my parishioners, it is a very different matter. In your case I have my duty to perform. It is one that can only cause me the deepest pain and anxiety, but I am determined that nothing

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shall interfere with it. Forgive my plainness, but your mind is in a most disorderly state. I am afraid Mr. Brandon is partly to blame. I have told him more than once that it was folly to give you the run of his library. You have been encouraged to read books beyond your mental grasp, or at least beyond your power to assimilate becomingly, in the manner of a gentleman. You are a half-educated man—it is my duty to speak out—and like all such men you are wise in your own conceit. Now there is reason to believe that, in virtue of an old statute which is still operative, you have made yourself amenable to the law of the land. At all events I intend to find out. And then will arise the question as to how far it will be one's duty to move in this matter."

Mr. Perry-Hennington watched the young man narrowly as he uttered this final threat. He had the satisfaction of observing that John Smith changed color a little. If, however, he had hoped to frighten the man it was by no means clear that he had succeeded.

"You follow your conscience, sir," he said with a sweet unconcern that added to the vicar's inward fury. "And I try to follow mine. But it is right to say to you that you are entering upon a deep coil. The soul of man is abroad in a dark night, yet the door is

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still open, and I pray that you at least will not seek to close it."

"The door—still open!" The vicar looked at him in amazement. "What door?"

"The door for all mankind."

"You speak in riddles."

"For the present let them so remain. But I will give you a piece of news. At two o'clock this morning a presence entered my room and said: 'I am Goethe and I have come to pray for Germany.'"

The vicar could only gaze in silence at John Smith.

"And I said: 'Certainly, I am very glad to pray for Germany,' and we knelt and prayed together. And then he rose and showed me the little town with its quaint gables and turrets where he sleeps at night, and I asked him to have courage and then I embraced him and then he left me, saying he would return again."

The vicar heard him to the end with a growing stupefaction. Such a speech in its complete detachment from the canons of reason could only mean that the man was unhinged. The words themselves would bear no other interpretation; but in spite of that the vicar's amazement soon gave way to a powerful resentment. At that moment the sense of outrage was stronger in him than anything else.

A certain practical sagacity enabled him to see at

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once that an abyss had opened between this grotesquely undisciplined mind and his own. The man might be merely recounting a dream, indulging a fancy, weaving an allegory, but at whatever angle he was approached by an incumbent of the Established Church, only one explanation could cover such lawlessness. The man was not of sound mind. And after all that was the one truly charitable interpretation of his whole demeanor and attitude. An ill-regulated, morbidly sensitive organization had broken down in the stress of those events which had sorely tried an intellect as stable as Mr. Perry-Hennington's own. Indeed it was only right to think so; otherwise, the vicar would have found it impossible to curb himself. Even as it was he dared not trust himself to say a word in reply. All at once he turned abruptly on his heel and walked away as on a former occasion.

IV

AS the vicar made his way across the green toward the village he deliberated very gravely. It was clear that such a matter would have to be followed up. But he must not act precipitately. Fully determined now not to flinch from an onerous task, he must look before and after.

Two courses presented themselves to his sense of outrage. And he must choose without delay. Before committing himself to definite action he must either see Gervase Brandon, whom he felt bound in a measure to blame for John Smith's state of mind, and take advice as to what should be done, or he must see the young man's mother and ask her help. It chanced, however, that Mrs. Smith's cottage was near by. Indeed it skirted the common, and he had raised the latch of her gate before he realized that the decision had somehow been made for him, apparently by a force outside himself.

It was a very humble abode, typical of that part of the world, but a trim hedge of briar in front, a growth of honeysuckle above the porch, and a low roof of thatch gave it a rustic charm. The door

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stone had been freshly whitened, and the window curtains, simple though they were, were so neat and clean that the outward aspect of Rose Cottage was almost one of refinement.

The vicar's sharp knock was answered by a village girl, a timid creature of fourteen. At the sight of the awe-inspiring figure on the threshold, she bobbed a curtsey, and in reply to the question: "Is Mrs. Smith at home?" gurgled an inaudible "Yiss surr."

"Is that the vicar?" said a faint voice.

Mr. Perry-Hennington said reassuringly that it was, and entered briskly, with that air of decision the old ladies of the parish greatly admired.

A puny, white-haired woman was seated in an arm-chair in the chimney corner, with a shawl over her shoulders. She had the pinched, wistful look of the permanent invalid, yet the peaked face and the vivid eyes had great intelligence. But they were also full of suffering, and the vicar, at heart genuinely kind, was struck by it at once.

"How are you today, Mrs. Smith?" he said.

"No better and no worse than I've been this last two years," said the widow in a voice that had not a trace of complaint. "It is very kind of you to come and see me. I wish I could come to church."

"I wish you could, Mrs. Smith." The vicar took a

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chair by her side. "It would be a privilege to have you with us again."

The widow smiled wanly. "It has been ordained otherwise," she said. "And I know better than to question. God moves in a mysterious way."

"Yes, indeed." The vicar was a little moved to find John Smith's mother in a state of grace. "There is strength and compensation in the thought."

"If one has found the Kingdom it doesn't matter how long one is tied to one's chair."

"It gratifies me to hear you say that." The vicar spoke in a measured tone. And then suddenly, as he looked at the calm face of the sufferer, he grew hopeful. "Mrs. Smith," he said, with the directness upon which he prided himself, "I have come to speak to you about your boy."

"About John?" The widow, the name on her lips, lowered her voice to a rapt, hushed whisper.

The vicar drew his chair a little closer to the invalid. "I am very, very sorry to cause you any sort of trouble, but I want to ask you to use your influence with him; I want to ask you to give him something of your own state of mind."

The widow looked at the vicar in surprise. "But," she said softly, "it is my boy John who has made me as I am."

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The vicar was a little disconcerted. "Surely," he said, "it is God who has made you what you are."

"Yes, but it is through my boy John that He has wrought upon me."

"Indeed! Tell me how that came to be."

The widow shook her head and smiled to herself. "Don't ask me to do that," she said. "It is a long and wonderful story."

But the vicar insisted.

"No, no, I can't tell you. I don't think anyone would believe me. And the time has not yet come for the story to be told."

The vicar still insisted, but this feeble creature had a will as tenacious as his own. His curiosity had been fully aroused, but common sense told him that in all human probability he had to deal with the hallucinations of an old and bedridden woman. A simple intensity of manner and words oddly devout made it clear that she was in a state of grace, yet it would seem to be rooted in some illusion in which her worthless son was involved. Although the vicar was without subtlety, he somehow felt that it would hardly be right to shatter that illusion. At the same time the key to his character was duty. And his office asked that in this case it should be rigidly performed. Let 'l possible light be cast upon the mental history of this

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man, even if an old and poor woman be stricken in the process. A cruel dilemma was foreshadowed, but let it be faced manfully.

"Mrs. Smith," he said after a trying pause, "I am very sorry, but there is bad news to give you of your son."

The effect of the words was remarkable.

"Oh, what has happened to him?" The placid face changed in an instant; one hand clutched at the thin bosom.

The vicar hastened to quell her fears. "Nothing has happened to him," he said in a grave, kind tone, "but I grieve to say that his conduct leaves much to be desired."

The widow could only stare at the vicar incredulously.

"I am greatly troubled about him. For a long time now I have known him to be a disseminator of idle and mischievous opinions. I have long suspected him of being a corrupter of our village youth. This morning"—carried away by a sudden warmth of feeling the vicar forgot the mother's frailty—"he insulted my daughter with a most blasphemous remark, and when I ventured to remonstrate with him he entered upon a farrago of light and meaningless talk. In a word, Mrs. Smith, much as it grieves me to say so, I find

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your son an atheist, a socialist and a freethinker and I am very deeply concerned for his future in this parish."

In the stress of indignation the vicar did not temper the wind to the shorn lamb. But the widow was less disconcerted than he felt he had a right to expect her to be. It was true that she listened with amazement, but far from being distressed, she met him with frank skepticism. It deepened an intense annoyance to find that she simply could not believe him.

He gave her chapter and verse. But a categorical indictment called forth the remark that, "John was such a great scholar that ordinary people could not be expected to understand him."

Such a statement added fuel to the flame. Mr. Perry-Hennington did not pretend to scholarship himself, but he had such a keen and just appreciation of that quality in other people that these ignorant words aroused a pitying contempt. The mother's attitude could only be taken as a desire to shield and uphold her son.

"Well, Mrs. Smith," said the vicar, rising from his chair, "I have to tell you that talk of this kind cannot be tolerated here. I very much hope you will speak to him on the matter."

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"But who am I, vicar, that I should presume to speak to him?"

"You are his mother."

"Of late I have begun to doubt whether I can be his mother."

The vicar looked at the widow in amazement. "Surely you know whether or not he is your son?" he said in stern surprise.

"Yes, he is the child of my body, but I grow afraid to claim him as mine."

"For what reason?"

"He is not as other men."

"I don't understand you," said the vicar with stern impatience.

The widow looked at the vicar with a sudden light of ecstasy in her eyes. "I can only tell you," she said, "that my husband was killed in battle months before a son was born to me. I can only tell you that I prayed and prayed continually that there might be no more wars. I can only tell you that one night an angel came to me and said that my prayer had been heard and would shortly be answered. I was told that I should live to see a war that would end all wars. And then my boy was born and I called him John Emanuel."

The vicar mustered all his patience as he listened,

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half-scandalized, to the widow's statement. He had to fortify himself with the obvious fact that she was a feeble creature who had known many sorrows, whose mind had at last given way. Somehow he felt a shocked resentment, but she was so palpably sincere that it was impossible to visit it upon her. And then the thought came to him that this pitiful illusion was going to add immensely to his difficulties. Having always known her for a decent woman and, when in health, a regular churchgoer, he had counted confidently upon her help. It came as a further embarrassment to find her mind affected. For her sake he might have been inclined to temporize a little with the son, in the hope that she would bring the influence of a known good woman to bear upon him. But that hope was now vain. The widow's own mind was in a state of almost equal disorder, and any steps the matter might demand must now be taken without her sanction.

Had the mother infected the son, or had the son infected the mother was now the vicar's problem. Regarding the one as a natural complement to the other, and reading them together, he saw clearly that both were a little unhinged. Beyond all things a good and humane man, he could not help blaming himself a little that he had not realized sooner the true state of

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the case. Now that he had spoken with the mother, the son became more comprehensible. Without a doubt the one had reacted on the other. It simplified the task it would be his bounden duty to perform, even if it did not make it less repugnant. The fact that two persons shared such a fantastic illusion made it doubly imperative that immediate steps should be taken in a matter which Mr. Perry-Hennington was now viewing with a growing concern.

"Mrs. Smith," he said very sternly, "there is one question I feel bound to ask. Am I right in the assumption that you regard your son as a—cr—a messiah?"

The answer came at once.

"Yes, vicar, I do," said the widow falteringly. "The angel of the Lord appeared to me, and my son John—if my son he is—has come to fulfill the Prophecy."

V

THE vicar left Rose Cottage in a state of the deepest perturbation he had ever known. He was not the kind of man who submits lightly to any such feeling, but again the sensation came upon him, which he had first felt half an hour ago in his amazing interview with John Smith, that an abyss had suddenly opened under his feet, into which he had already stumbled.

That such heresies should be current in his own little cure of Penfold-with-Churley, with which he had taken such infinite trouble for the past thirty-five years, that they should arise in his own personal epoch, and that of his favorite books and newspapers and friends and fellow workers and thinkers, was so remarkable that he hardly knew how to face the sore problem to which they gave rise. Unquestionably such ideas were a by-product of this terrible war which was tearing up civilization by the roots. In a sense there was consolation in the thought. Abnormal events give rise to abnormal mental processes. Half-developed, ill-regulated, morbidly impressionable minds were very

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likely to be overthrown by such a phase as the world was now passing through. But even that reflection did little to reduce Mr. Perry-Hennington's half-indignant sense of horror, or to soften the fierce ordeal in which he was now involved.

What should he do? An old shirker of issues he did not look for help in the quarter where some might have sought it. He was therefore content to put his question to the bracken, to the yellow gorse, to the golden light of heaven which was now beginning to beat uncomfortably upon him.

"Why do anything?" answered the inner voice of the university graduate qua the county gentleman. "Edith is naturally a little upset, but the question to ask oneself is: Are these poor crackbrains really doing any harm?"

Mr. Perry-Hennington had been long accustomed to identify that particular voice with the highest part of himself. In many of the minor crises which had arisen in his life he had thankfully and gratefully followed it. There were times undoubtedly when it was the duty of a prudent person to turn the blind eye to the telescope. But a very little reflection convinced him that this occasion was not one of them.

Apart from the fact that it was quite impossible to allow such a fantastic heresy to arise in his parish,

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there was the public interest to consider. The country was living under martial law, and it had come to his knowledge that the King's enemies were receiving open countenance. The man Smith was a poor sort of creature enough, however one might regard him, but he was thought to have influence among persons of his own standing, and it was said to be growing. Moreover, there was "his faith-healing tomfoolery" to be taken into account; at the best a trivial business, yet also a portent, which was having an effect upon the credulous and the ignorant. Therefore the man must be put in his place. And if possible he must be taught a lesson. The subject was beset with thorns of the prickliest kind, but the vicar had never lacked moral courage of an objective sort, and he felt he would be unworthy of his cloth if for a moment he allowed himself to shirk his obvious duty.

While a rather hide-bound intellect set squarely to the problem before it, Mr. Perry-Hennington marched slowly along the only attempt at a street that the village of Penfold could boast. At the far end was a massive pair of iron gates picked out with gold, surmounted by a medieval arch of stone, upon which a coat of arms was emblazoned. Beyond these portals was a short avenue of glorious trees which led to the

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beautiful old house known as Hart's Ghyll, the seat for many generations of the squires of Penfold.

The symbol above the gates brought the vicar up short with a shock of surprise. Unconscious of the direction in which the supraliminal self had been leading him, he was inclined to accept it as the clear direction of a force beyond himself. It seemed, therefore, right to go at once and lay this difficult matter before Gervase Brandon, the man whom he felt bound to blame more than anyone else for John Smith's unhappy state of mind.

The owner of Hart's Ghyll, having married Mr. Perry-Hennington's niece, could claim to be his relation by marriage. Brandon, a man of forty-two, born to the purple of assured social position, rich, cultivated, happily wed, the father of two delightful children, had seemed to possess everything that the heart of man could desire. Moreover, he had a reputation not merely local as a humane and liberal thinker—a too liberal thinker in the opinion of the vicar, who was proud to belong to a sturdier school. A model landlord who housed his laborers in absurdly modern and hygienic dwellings, who, somewhat to the scandal of less enlightened neighbors, allowed his smaller tenants to farm his land at purely nominal rents, he

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did his best to foster a spirit of thrift, independence and true communal feeling.

As a consequence there were those who held the squire of Penfold to be a mirror of all the virtues. There was also a smaller but vastly more influential class which could not bear to hear his name mentioned. He was mad, said the county Guys of the district. The vicar of Penfold did not go quite to that length, but he sympathized with the point of view. When he lunched and dined, as he often did, with the neighboring magnates, he was wont to sigh sadly over "that fellow Brandon," and at the same time gravely lament, but not without an air of plaintive humor, that niece Millicent had yet to teach him sense. And this statement always involved the corollary that niece Millicent's failure was the more surprising since the Perry-Henningtons were a sound old Tory stock.

The opinion current in old-port-drinking circles was that Grevasé Brandon was as charming a fellow as you would meet in a day's march, but that he was over-educated—he had been a don at Oxford before he came into the property—and that he had more money to spend than was good for him. For some years he had been "queering the pitch" for less happily placed neighbors and contemporaries, and these found it hard to forgive him. They had prophesied that the day

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would come when his vagaries would cause trouble, and at the moment the famous Brandon coat of arms of the lion and the dove, and its motto: "Let the weak help the strong, let the strong help the weak," came within the vicar's purview, he felt that the prophecy had been most oddly, not to say dramatically, fulfilled.

If blame there was for the appearance of a Mad Mullah in the parish, without a doubt it must be laid to the door of Gervase Brandon. In the most absurd way he had long encouraged one whom the vicar could only regard as a wastrel. He had allowed this incorrigible fellow the run of the Hart's Ghyll library, and the vicar recalled meeting John Smith in the village street with a priceless Elzevir copy of Plato's *Theætetus* under his arm, the Brandon crest stamped on the leather, the Brandon bookplate inside. The vicar understood that the man had been a frequent visitor at the house, that money had been given him from time to time, and that the mother had been allowed to occupy the cottage on the common rent free. Was it to be wondered at that a weak, half-developed brain had been thrown off its balance?

In these circumstances it was right that Gervase Brandon should be made to understand the mischief he had wrought; it was right that he should be called

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upon to take a hand in the adjustment of the coil. But as Mr. Perry-Hennington passed through the gate of Hart's Ghyll and walked slowly up the avenue toward the house there was still a reservation in his mind. As matters were with Brandon now he might not be able to grapple with a problem of a nature to make heavy demands upon the mental and moral faculties.

The vicar had scarcely entered upon this aspect of the case, when the sight of a spinal carriage in the care of two nurses forbade any more speculation upon the subject. He was suddenly brought face to face with reality in a grimly practical shape.

"How are you this morning, Gervase?" said the vicar, stopping the little procession with a hearty voice. The question was addressed to a gaunt, yellow-eyed man in a green dressing gown, who was propped up on pillows.

"I've nothing to complain of," said Gervase Brandon. He spoke in a calm, gentle way. "Another capital night."

"Do you still have pain?"

"None for a week, I'm thankful to say. But I touch wood!"

The optimistic, almost gay tone did not deceive the vicar. The tragic part of the matter was that the

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cessation of pain was not a hopeful sign. Brandon might not have known that. This morning, at any rate, he had the half-defiant cheerfulness of one who did not intend to admit physical calamity. Yet he must have well understood the nature of the thing that had come upon him. For three long, terrible months he had lain on his back, paralyzed from the waist down, the result of shell shock sustained on the beaches of Gallipoli. There was every reason to fear a lesion of certain ganglia, and little hope was now held out that he would ever walk again.

To a man in meridian pride of body such a prospect hardly bore thinking about. But the blow had been borne with a fortitude at which even a man so unimaginative as the vicar could only marvel. Not again would the owner of Hart's Ghyll prune his roses, or drive a golf ball, or cast a fly, or take a pot shot at a rabbit; not again would he take his children on his knee.

Brandon had always been the least militant of men. His instincts were liberal and humane, and in the happy position of being able to live as he chose he had gratified them to the full. He had had everything to attach him to existence; if ever fortune had had a favorite it was undoubtedly he. It had given him everything, with a great zest in life as a crowning

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boon. But in August, 1914, in common with so many of his countrymen, he had cast every personal consideration to the wind and embraced a life which he loathed with every fiber of his being.

He had only allowed himself one reason for the voluntary undertaking of a bestial task, and it was the one many others of his kind had given: "So that that chap won't have to do it"—the chap in question being an engaging, curly-headed urchin still in the care of a governess. Well, the father had "done his bit," but as far as the small son was concerned there was no guaranty that it had not been done in vain. And none knew that better than the shattered man propped up in the spinal carriage.

The sight of Gervase Brandon had done something to weaken the vicar's resolve. It hardly seemed right to torment the poor fellow with this extremely disagreeable matter. Yet a moment's reflection convinced Mr. Perry-Hennington that it would be most unwise to take any decisive step without discussing it with the man best able to throw light upon it. Moreover, as the vicar recognized, Brandon's mental powers did not seem to have shared his body's eclipse. He appeared to enjoy them to the full; in fact it might be said that complete physical prostration had added to their perceptiveness. Whenever the vicar talked with

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him now he was much impressed by the range and quality of his mind.

"Gervase," said the vicar after a brief mental survey of the position, "I wonder if I might venture to speak to you about something that is troubling me a good deal?"

"Certainly, certainly," said the occupant of the spinal carriage, with an alert, almost eager smile. "If there's any way in which I can be of the slightest use, or any way in which you think I can I shall be only too delighted."

"I hate having to bother you with a matter of this kind. But it is likely that you know something about it. And I am greatly in need of advice, which I hope you may be able to give."

"I hope I may." The vicar's gravity was not lost upon Brandon. "Perhaps you would like to discuss it in the library?"

"If you don't mind."

VI

TO the library the spinal carriage was taken. When it had been wheeled into the sunny embrasure of that wonderful room, which even the vicar never entered without a slight pang of envy, the nurses retired, leaving the two men together.

The library of Hart's Ghyll was richly symbolical of the aristocracy of an old country. It had once been part of a monastery which had been set, as happened invariably when religion had a monopoly of learning and taste, in the fairest spot the countryside could offer for the purpose. From the large mullioned window the view of Hart's Ghyll and its enchanted vistas of hill, stream and woodland beyond was a miracle of beauty. And the walls of the room displayed treasures above price, such a collection of first editions and old masters as even a man so insensitive as the vicar sometimes recalled in his dreams. Their present owner, who in the vicar's opinion had imbibed the modern spirit far too freely, had often said that he could not defend possession in such abundance by one who had done nothing to earn it. In an ideal state,

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had declared this advanced thinker, these things would be part of the commonweal—a theory which Mr. Perry-Hennington considered fantastic. To his mind, as he had informed niece Millicent, it was perilously like an affront to the order of divine providence.

The spirit of place seemed to descend upon the vicar, as in a hushed, rather solemn tone, he asked Brandon whether the sun would be too much for him.

"Not for a man who has been grilled in Gallipoli," answered Brandon with a stoic's smile. "But if you will open that window a little wider and roll me back a bit, I shall have my own piece of earth to look at. Give me this and you may take the rest of Christendom. It's been soaked into my bones, into my brain. One ought to be a Virgil or a Wordsworth."

"Which I hope you may presently prove, my dear fellow," said the vicar, touched by a sense of the man's heroism.

"Alas, they are born."

"In spirit at any rate you are with them." The vicar was moved to an infrequent compliment.

But he had suddenly grown nervous. Now that he was face to face with his task he didn't know how to enter upon it. The wave of indignation which had borne him as far as the library of Hart's Ghyll had been dissipated by the presence of a suffering it was

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surely inhuman to embarrass. The younger man, his rare faculty of perception strung to a high pitch, saw at once the vicar's hesitation. Like an intensely sympathetic woman, Brandon began unconsciously to help him disburden his mind of that which was trying it so sorely.

At last Mr. Perry-Hennington found himself at the point where it became possible to break the ice.

"My dear Gervase," he said, "there is nothing I dislike more than having to ask you to share my troubles, but a most vexing matter has arisen, and you are the only person whose advice I feel I can take."

"I only hope I can be of use."

"Well—it's John Smith." The vicar took the plunge. And as he did so, he was sufficiently master of himself to watch narrowly the face of the stricken man.

Brandon fixed deep eyes upon the vicar.

"But he's such a harmless fellow." The light tone, the placid smile, told nothing.

"I admit, of course, that one oughtn't to be worried by a village wastrel."

"I challenge the term," said Brandon with the note of airy banter which always charmed. "Not for the first time, you know. I'm afraid we shall never agree about the dear chap."

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"No, I'm afraid we shall not." The vicar could not quite keep resentment out of his voice. But in deference to a graceful and perhaps merited rebuke, the controversialist lowered his tone a little. "But let me give you the facts."

Thereupon, with a naïveté not lost upon the man in the spinal carriage, Mr. Perry-Hennington very solemnly related the incident of the white feather.

Brandon said nothing, but looked at the vicar fixedly.

"I hate having to worry you in this way." Mr. Perry-Hennington watched narrowly the drawn face. "Of course it had to be followed up. At first, I'll confess, I took it to be a mere piece of blasphemous bravado in execrable taste, but now I've seen the man, now I've talked with him, I have come to another conclusion."

The vicar saw that Brandon's eyes were full of an intense, eager interest.

"Well?" said the sufferer softly.

"The conclusion I have come to is that it's a case of paranoia."

"That is to say, you think he intended the statement to be taken literally?"

"I do. But I didn't realize that all at once. When I accused him of blasphemy he defended himself with

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a farrago of quasi mystical gibberish which amounted to nothing, and he ended with a perfectly fantastic statement. Let me give it you word for word. 'At two o'clock this morning a presence entered my room and said, "I am Goethe and I have come to pray for Germany." And I said, "Certainly, I shall be very glad to pray for Germany," and we knelt and prayed together. And then he rose and showed me the little town with its quaint gables and turrets where he sleeps at night, and I asked him to have courage and then I embraced him and then he left me, saying he would return again.' "

Brandon's face had an ever-deepening interest, but he did not venture upon a remark.

"Of course," said the vicar, "one's answer should have been, 'My friend, he who aids, abets and harbors an unregistered alien enemy becomes amenable to the Defense of the Realm Regulations.' "

"What *was* your answer?" The look of bewilderment was growing upon Brandon's face.

"I made none. I was completely bowled out. But I went at once to see the mother. And this is where the oddest part of all comes in. After a little conversation with the mother, I discovered that she most sincerely believes that her son is—is a messiah."

Again the stricken man closed his eyes.

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"There we have the clue. In a very exalted way she told me how her son was born six months after her husband had been killed in action. She told me how she had prayed that all wars might cease, how an angel appeared to her with a promise that she would live to see the war which would end all wars; she told me how a son was born to her in fulfillment of the prophecy, and how she christened him John Emanuel. I was astounded. But now I have had time to think about the matter much is explained. The man is clearly suffering from illusions prenatally induced. There is no doubt a doctor would tell us that it explains his fits. It also accounts for his faith-healing nonsense. And there is no doubt that mother and son have reacted upon one another in such a way that they are now stark crazy."

"And that is your deliberate opinion?"

"With the facts before me I can come to no other. It is the only charitable explanation. Otherwise I should have felt it to be my duty to institute a prosecution under the blasphemy laws. Only the other day there was a man—a tailor, I believe—imprisoned under the statute of Henry VII. But if, as there is now every reason to think, it is a simple case of insanity, one will be relieved from that disagreeable necessity."

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Brandon concurred.

"But as you will readily see, my dear Gervase, the alternative is almost equally distressing. To clear him of the charge of blasphemy it will be necessary to prove him insane; and in that event, of course, he cannot remain at large."

"Surely the poor chap is quite harmless?"

"Harmless?" Mr. Perry-Hennington had difficulty in keeping his voice under control. "A man who goes about the parish proclaiming himself a god!"

"He has Plotinus with him at any rate." Again the stricken man closed his eyes. "How says the sage? 'Surely before this descent into generation we existed in the intelligible world; being other men than now we are, and some of us Gods; clear souls and minds immixed with all existence; parts of the Intelligible, nor severed thence; nor are we severed even now.'"¹

"Really, my dear Gervase," said the vicar, trying very hard to curb a growing resentment, "one should hesitate to quote the pagan philosophers in a matter of this kind."

"I can't agree. They are far wiser than us in the only thing that matters after all. They have more windows open in the soul."

¹ *Enn VI. 4. 14* [F. W. H. Myers].

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"No, no." Mr. Perry-Hennington strove against vehemence. "Still, we won't go into that." He was on perilous ground. Of late years Brandon himself had been a thorn in the sacerdotal cushion. The modern spirit had led him to skepticism, so that, in the vicar's phrase, "he had become an alien in the household of faith." Now was not the moment to open an old wound or to revive the embers of controversy. But the vicar felt the old spiritual enmity, which Brandon's stoic heroism had lulled to sleep, again stirring his blood. Therefore, he must not allow himself to be involved in a false issue. Let him keep rigidly to the business in hand. And the business in hand was: What shall be done with John Smith?

It was clear at once that in Brandon's opinion there was no need to do anything. The vicar felt ruefully that he should have foreseen this attitude. But he had a right to hope that Brandon's recent experiences, even if they had not changed him fundamentally, would have done something to modify the central heresies. Nothing was further from the vicar's desire than to bear hardly upon one who had carried himself so nobly, but Brandon's air of tolerance was a laxity not to be borne. Mr. Perry-Hennington's soul was on fire. It was as much as he could do to hold himself in hand.

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"You see, my dear fellow," he said, "as the case presents itself to me, I must do one of two things. Either I must institute a prosecution for blasphemy, so that the law may deal with him, or, as I think would be the wiser and more humane course, I must take steps to have him removed to an asylum."

"But why do anything?"

"I feel it to be my duty."

"But he's so harmless. And a dear fellow."

"I wish I could share your opinion. I can only regard him as a plague spot in the parish. Insanity is his only defense and it has taken such a noxious form that it may infect others."

"Hardly likely, one would think."

"We live in abnormal times. I am very sorry, but I can only regard this man as a moral danger to the community. Edith was greatly shocked. I was greatly shocked. You must excuse my saying so, Ger-vase, but I cannot help feeling that in the circumstances the vast majority of right-thinking people would be."

"But who are the people who think rightly?"

Mr. Perry-Hennington raised a deprecating hand. Yet Brandon, having acted in the way he had, was entitled to put the question. He had given more than life for an idea, and that fact made it immensely dif-

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ficult for the vicar to deal with him as faithfully as he could have wished. He was face to face with a skeptic, but the skeptic was intrenched in a special position where neither contempt nor active reproach of any kind must visit him.

But in spite of himself the old slumbering antagonisms were now awake in the vicar. Brandon, too, was a dangerous paradoxical man. Notwithstanding the honor and the love he bore him, Mr. Perry-Hennington felt his pulses quicken, his fibers stiffen. If ever man did, he saw his duty straight and clear. The only real problem was how to do it with the least affront to others, with the least harm to the community.

"By the way," said Brandon, his gentle voice filling an awkward pause that had suddenly ensued, "have you ever really talked with John Smith?"

"Oh, yes, many times."

"I mean have you ever really tried—if I may put it that way—to get at the back of his mind?"

"As far as one can. But to me he seems to have precious little in the way of mind to get at the back of. As far as one's own limited intelligence will allow one to judge, the mind of John Smith seems a half-baked morass, a mere hotch-potch of moonstruck transcendentalisms, overlaid with a kind of Swedenborgian mysticism, if one may so express oneself. To

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me it seems a case where a little regular training at a university and the clear thinking it induces would have been of enormous value."

Brandon smiled. "Have you seen his poem?" he asked.

"No." The answer was short; and then the vicar asked in a tone which had a tinge of disgust, "Written a poem, has he?"

"He brought it to me the other day." Again Brandon closed his eyes. "To my mind it is very remarkable," he said half to himself.

"It would be, no doubt," said the vicar, half to himself also.

"I should like you to read it."

"I prefer not to do so," said the vicar after a pause. "My mind is quite made up about him. It would only vex me further to read anything he may have written. We live by deeds, not by words, and never more so than in this stern time."

"To my mind, it is a very wonderful poem," said the stricken man. "I don't think I am morbidly impressionable—I hope I'm not—but that poem haunts me. It is even changing my outlook. It is an extravagant thing to say, but the feeling it leaves on one's mind is that if a spectator of all time and all existence, a sort of Cosmostheorus, were to visit the

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planet at this moment, it is the way in which he might be expected to deliver himself."

"Neoplatonism of the usual brand, I presume." There was a slight curl of a thin lip.

"Of a very unusual brand, I assure you. It may be neoplatonism, and yet—no—one cannot give it a label. There is the Something Else behind it." Once more the stricken man closed his eyes. "Yes, there is the Something Else. The thing infolds me like a dream, a passion. I feel it changing me."

"What is it called?" the vicar permitted himself to ask.

"It is called 'The Door.'"

"Why 'The Door'?"

"Is there a Door still open for the human race?—that is the question the poem asks."

"A kind of mysticism, I presume?"

"I wish I could persuade you to read the poem. To my mind it has exquisite beauty, and a profundity beyond anything I have ever read. It asks a question which at this moment admits of no answer. Everything hangs in the balance. But the theme of the poem is the future's vital need, the keeping open, at all costs, of the Door."

Mr. Perry-Hennington shook his head sadly, but the gesture was not without indulgence. He was ready

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to make allowance for Brandon's present state. The importance he attached to such lucubrations was quite unworthy of an ex-Fellow of Gamaliel, at any rate in the eyes of a former Fellow of All Saints, which under an old but convenient dispensation Mr. Perry-Hennington could claim to be. This morbid sensibility was a fruit of Brandon's disease no doubt. But for his own part the vicar had neither time nor inclination for what could only be an ill-digested farrago of mystical moonshine. Unhappily nothing was left to poor Brandon now except to ease his mind as best he could. Such a mental condition was to be deplored. Yet the vicar fervently hoped that the cancer would not bite too deep.

"Do let me get the poem for you to read." Brandon's eyes were full of entreaty.

"No, no, my dear fellow," said the vicar gently. "I really haven't time to give to such things just now. All one's energies are absorbed in dealing with things as they are. I am quite prepared to take your word that the poem has literary merit—after all, you are a better judge of such matters than I am. But for those of us who have still our work to do, this is not a moment for poetic fancies or any other form of self-indulgence. Moreover, I must reserve my right

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to full liberty of action in a matter which is causing me grave concern."

With these words the vicar took a chastened leave. It was clear that nothing was to be hoped for in this quarter. Bitterly disappointed, but more than ever determined to do his duty in a matter which promised to become increasingly difficult, the vicar shook Brandon gently by the hand and left the room. In the large Tudor hall, with its stone flags, old oak and rare tapestry, he came suddenly upon his niece.

Millicent Brandon looked too girlish to be the mother of the two lusty creatures whom she was helping to fit together a picture puzzle which had been spread out on a table. Tall, slight, a picture of vivid health, she had a charming prettiness of an unusual kind. And in the clear, long-lashed eyes was an eagerness, an intensity of life which the elf-like Babs and the sturdy, yellow-headed Joskin shared with her. Even the vicar, who noticed so little, was struck by the force of the contrast between this rich vitality and the broken man whom he had left a moment ago.

It was clear, however, that above Millicent Brandon's high spirit hovered the dark shadow which continually haunted her. Behind the surface gayety was an anxiety which never slept, a gnawing fear that no preoccupation could allay. The solid, sensible vicar

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was liked and respected by women, and he now received the affectionate greeting of his niece, who was genuinely pleased to see him. But her tone had much solicitude.

"Well, Uncle Tom," was her eager question, "what do you think of Gervase?"

The vicar did not answer at once, but drew in his lips a little, in the manner of a cautious physician with a reputation for absolute and fearless honesty.

"He seems cheerful," he said.

"Everybody thinks he keeps up in the most wonderful way. And do you know, he has begun to read again? A fortnight ago he seemed hardly able to bear the thought of a book; he couldn't be got to look at a newspaper or even to listen to one. But that is now a thing of the past. All the old interest is coming back. Last night I read Pascal to him for nearly an hour, and he followed it the whole time with the closest attention."

"I hope you had the doctor's permission," said the vicar with a frown.

"Oh, yes. Both Dr. Shrubb and Dr. Joliffe are very pleased. Dr. Shrubb was here yesterday. He thinks it is the most hopeful sign we have yet had."

"I am very glad indeed to hear it," said the vicar with a puzzled face.

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"Of course he can promise nothing—absolutely nothing, but he thinks it is a great thing for the mind to be aroused. A fortnight ago Gervase couldn't be induced to take an interest in anything. And now he listens to Pascal and reads the *Times*."

The vicar's frown grew more perplexed. "And the doctors are pleased?"

"Oh, yes."

"How do they account for the change?"

"They give no explanation, but I have a theory that in a sort of way the person who is really responsible for it—I know you'll laugh at me—is that dear fellow, John Smith."

"Oh, indeed," said the vicar in a hard, dry voice.

"I know you don't altogether approve of him, Uncle Tom, but he's such a charming, whimsical, gentle creature, just a little mad they seem to think in the village, but Gervase has always made a friend of him."

"So I understand." The voice was that of a statesman; the frown was growing portentous.

"Well, every day since Gervase came home the dear fellow has picked a bunch of flowers on the common and brought them here. And every day he has begged to see Gervase. A fortnight ago, when Gervase had been out of his room twice, I decided that he might. I felt sure no harm could come of it. So he came

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and it seems he talked to Gervase of a poem he had written—I didn't hear the conversation so I can't throw much light on it—but the next day he returned with the poem. And the amazing part is that Gervase read it, and dating from then he seems to have found a new interest in everything."

"And you are inclined to attribute the change in the first place to the effect of this man's verses?"

"Yes. It seems a little absurd. But in my own mind I can't help thinking that the improvement is entirely due to John Smith."

"Have you read these verses, by the way?"

"No. It's quite a long poem, I believe, stanza upon stanza, but Gervase returned it at once. Since its effect has been so remarkable I am thinking of trying to get hold of it."

"Doesn't this strike you as very odd, that is, assuming your theory of the poem's effect upon a man like Gervase to be correct?"

"Yes, quite extraordinary. He was always so fastidious, a man to whom only the best and highest appealed."

"Quite so." The vicar pursed his lips. "And it is a fact to look in the face, my dear Millicent. As you know, I am a great believer in looking facts in the face."

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"You think, Uncle Tom, it implies mental deterioration?"

"One hardly likes to say that," said the vicar cautiously. "But that is what we have to fear."

A deepening anxiety crept into the eyes of the wife. "It does seem a reasonable explanation. But please don't forget that Gervase took no interest in any subject until John Smith came, and that now he has begun to read the Bible."

"It is certainly remarkable if such is the case. By the way, do the doctors allow him to read the Bible?"

"He may read anything."

"And they consider him quite rational?"

"Perfectly rational." Millicent looked at the vicar in some surprise. "Don't you, Uncle Tom?"

The vicar would have evaded the question had he been able to do so. But with those candid eyes upon him that was impossible. Moreover, the old habit of fearless honesty in all things did not permit a deliberate lie.

Millicent declined to accept his silence. "You don't!" She pinned him down to a reply.

"If the doctors are satisfied," said the vicar slowly, "that is the important thing. One doesn't set up one's opinion against theirs, you know."

But he was not to escape in that way.

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"Evidently you don't agree with them, Uncle Tom. Now I want you to be perfectly frank and tell me just how you feel about Gervase."

"Well, I will." The vicar spoke slowly and weightily. "Since you press the question, his whole outlook appears to me to be changing."

"But not for the worse, surely?"

"That I cannot say. It is only my opinion and I give it for what it is worth, but I don't quite approve this change which is coming over Gervase."

"Didn't you find him happy and cheerful?"

"I did. But that is not the point. My feeling is that if Gervase were perfectly rational he would not attach so much importance to the—er—lucubrations of this fellow, John Smith."

"But Gervase has always been a great lover of poetry," said the surprised Millicent. "He took prizes for it at Eton, and at Oxford he won a medal. His love of poetry is really nothing new; in fact he passes for an expert on the subject."

"That is my point. I have always shared that view of Gervase. In common with the rest of the world, I have greatly admired his translations from the Greek. But that being the case, the question one must now ask oneself is, why does a man of sure taste, of real scholarship, suddenly surrender his mind to

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the fantastic trivialities of a half-baked, half-educated village loafer?"

"But you've not read the poem," said Millicent with a little air of triumph, in which, however, relief was uppermost.

"No good thing can come out of Babylon. It isn't reasonable to expect it. Why, I've known that fellow Smith nearly twenty years. I know exactly what education he has had, I know his record."

"I won't venture to argue with you, Uncle Tom. Your opinion is worth so much more than mine, but isn't there such a thing as genius?"

"There may be. Although it is a thing I am rather skeptical about myself; that is to say I regard it primarily as an infinite capacity for taking pains, a natural fruit of learning and study. That is why to my mind it is more *wholesome* to believe that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. Nay, it must have been so, for it is surely a rational canon that the most highly trained mind of the age wrote Hamlet, Othello and King Lear, rather than an inspired clodhopper who began life as a butcher's apprentice."

"Well, Uncle Tom," said his niece demurely, "of course I mustn't argue with you, but aren't your views rather like those of a character in a most amusing play I saw in London the other day? When a dra-

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matic critic was asked to criticize a play, he said, 'How can one begin to criticize a play until one knows the name of the author?' "

"Quite so, quite so," said Mr. Perry-Hennington triumphantly. "A very apt illustration of my point."

"But it is also an illustration of mine. At least I hope it is."

"Then I'm afraid we are arguing about entirely different things."

"Well, Uncle Tom," said the tenacious Millicent, "I am arguing about what Gervase would call the peril of a priori judgments. It seems to me that the Christian religion itself is a proof of it. How does your theory account for the fact that Jesus was a village carpenter?"

The vicar drew up his long, thin, rather ascetic frame to the topmost of its seventy-two inches. "My dear child," he said solemnly, "my theory accounts for that fact by simply assuming that Jesus was God Himself. It is the only reasonable hypothesis. Without it there is no such thing as the Christian religion."

"But, Uncle Tom, to quote Gervase again, isn't that the greatest of all assumptions for a rational mind to make?"

"Undoubtedly, my dear. And it is only permitted to us to make it by the implicit eye of faith."

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"Do you mean that the Incarnation is the only matter in which we are to exercise faith?"

"Ah, now we are getting into theology." Mr. Perry-Hennington took up his niece with a little air of bland condescension. "You mustn't bother your pretty head about that. I must go now." A pang shot through him as he suddenly remembered the morrow's sermon. "I must leave you, my dear, to help the children put together their picture puzzle. Good-by. Gervase is really quite as well as I had hoped to find him. Let us continue to have faith."

Thereupon the vicar tore himself away from a controversy in which he felt he was showing, as usual, to singular advantage. He was so sure of the ground on which he stood, that even poor Gervase's highly trained intellect, of which the callow, fluffy-headed Millicent was the merest echo, was hardly able to meet him upon it. Moreover the vicar was a born fighter, and the trend of the discussion with his niece had had the effect of stirring in his mind the embers of a latent antagonism. The truth was, Brandon had never been quite forgiven a *mot* he had once permitted himself. He had said that the Established Church was determined to eat his cake and to have it: that is, it was reared on the basis of two and two makes five,

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but ordered its conduct on the basis of two and two makes four.

As the vicar left the inner hall he heard the voice of the curly-headed Joskin uplifted in a wail: "Oh, mummy, *do* come and help us! We can't fit it in. There's a piece missing."

VII

THE vicar remembered his sermon and looked at his watch. It was within twenty minutes of luncheon; the most valuable morning of the week was gone. The spirit of vexation rose in him again. It was all the fault of this miserable fellow, John Smith. Two priceless hours had been lavished on this wastrel, this dead charge on the community. Moreover he would not be able to make up for lost time in the course of the afternoon. At three o'clock he was due at Brombridge to attend the War Economy Committee; at seven he had to take the chair at a recruiting meeting at Grayfield, and dine afterward with his old Magdalen friend, Whympers.

It cut him to the heart to forego the morrow's sermon. He was the soul of conscientiousness, and not since his attack of rheumatoid arthritis nine years ago had he failed to come up to time on Sunday evening with a brand new discourse. And if ever one was needed it was now. The time cried aloud for pulpit direction. The government was conducting the war in half-hearted fashion. It had not yet dared to bring

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in a Conscription Bill, yet in Mr. Perry-Hennington's opinion every man and every woman in the country up to the age of sixty-five ought to have been forcibly enlisted months ago. Several times already he had made that proposal in the newspapers over his own signature, and it had been greatly applauded by the only sort of people who counted in war time.

The hour was certainly ripe for a rasper in the way of a sermon. The nation wanted "gingering up." He must find time somehow to put his ideas together against Sunday evening. As he strode with his long legs down the glorious avenue of Hart's Ghyll he felt braced and reënforced with energy. Once more his thought, began to flow. He had his text at any rate, and it ought not to be difficult to strike something compelling out of it. By the time the porter's lodge was reached, he had grown quite hopeful. Phrases, ideas, were filling his mind; perhaps his morning had not been wholly wasted after all; it seemed to have stirred him to something. "Let us put on the armor of light." For the vicar those words were a bugle call to the old Adam within. The spirit of conflict, like a sleeping giant, sprang to new life.

Hardly had Mr. Perry-Hennington passed beyond the iron gates into the village street, when a rather

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perspiring, decidedly genial-looking man on a bicycle immediately recalled his pastoral duty to his mind. Nay, it was more than that. The matter of John Smith had as much to do with the state as the recruiting question, the economy question, the supineness of the government, and the morrow's sermon.

"Good-morning, Joliffe," said the vicar in a hearty, detaining voice. "The very man I want to see."

"Nothing wrong at home I hope," said the man on the bicycle, who was the village doctor. He spoke in a simple, direct, unaffectedly practical way, which all the same was not without a faint note of deference, ever grateful to Mr. Perry-Hennington's ear.

Dr. Joliffe slowed up and hopped from his bicycle.

"No, nothing of that kind I'm glad to say." The vicar's reply was equally precise and to the point. "But I want to have a little talk with you privately about a matter that is worrying me a good deal."

"Very glad any time." Dr. Joliffe looked at his watch. "Why not come and take potluck with me now—if you are not afraid of Mrs. Small in war time. She's not up to your form at any time, but you are very welcome to what we have."

The vicar hesitated. He was expected at home, but John Smith was burning a hole in his mind. He felt there must be no delay in taking a man whom

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he could trust into his confidence, and if he lost this present opportunity no other chance might arise for several days.

"You will?" said the practical Joliffe. "Although you'll not expect much. I'll send my boy along to the vicarage to tell them not to wait for you."

Mr. Perry-Hennington allowed himself to be persuaded. Joliffe was the only person in the place to whom he might turn for help; moreover he was a discreet, unaffectedly honest man whom the vicar had always instinctively trusted. And disconcerted as he was by Brandon's attitude in the matter, it was imperative that no time should be lost in taking competent advice.

The doctor's abode was a rather fine, small Georgian specimen, standing back from the center of the village street. A widower and childless in a house too large for his needs, a man of taste in furniture and bric-a-brac, with a capital cellar and a good cigar for his friends, he was also a man of private means to whom the neighboring villages owed a great deal. He was such an excellent fellow, so widely and so justly respected, that it was a little odd to find him tinged with the national vice of servility. But with all his great merits he sometimes found it rather hard to forget that he belonged to the middle class and

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that the vicar belonged to the aristocracy. It may have been for that reason that Mr. Perry-Hennington felt so much confidence in his judgment. At any rate, the satisfying sense that Joliffe was aware of the deference due to a peer's brother oiled the wheels of their intercourse, and enabled the vicar to treat him with a bonhomie which he knew would not be abused.

Mrs. Small had only a cottage pie and a pancake to offer the august visitor, but in spite of the King's edict, to which the host apologetically referred, this fare was eked out by a very honest glass of brown sherry, a cup of coffee that did Mrs. Small great credit, and a really excellent cigar.

Both gentlemen were due at Brombridge at three, to which center of activity the doctor proposed to drive the vicar in his runabout. This suited the vicar very well. He would be there and back in half the time required by his gig. And old Alice, who was rising twenty-four, would be able to save herself for the evening journey to Grayfield, which old Alice's master, fully conscious that "the old girl was not what she had been," and a humane man to boot, had been inclined to view with some little concern. Things were turning out for the best in the mundane sphere at any rate, and the vicar was not unpleasantly aware of this fact as, after-luncheon cigar alight, he en-

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tered upon the incidental cause of a modest but agreeable meal to which he had done perhaps rather better justice than the state of his emotions justified.

"Joliffe," said the vicar, taking a long and impressive pull at his cigar, "what I really want to talk to you about is that fellow John Smith. I am sorry to say I've come to the conclusion that he can no longer be allowed to stay in the parish."

"Indeed," said the doctor casually. "A harmless sort of creature I've always thought. Doesn't quite know himself perhaps. A little too free with his opinions may be, but strictly between ourselves"—Dr. Joliffe's voice grew respectfully confidential—"I think we may lay that to the door of someone else."

"Brandon, eh? I agree." The vicar grew magisterial. "Always an injudicious fellow. That's the worst of your radical. Gives these intermediate sort of people ideas."

"Quite so. I wish you'd try the brandy." The host pushed it across.

"No. Really. War time, you know."

"I should value your opinion. Just half a glass."

"Well, half a glass. To return to John Smith. Excellent brandy. My girl, Edith, presented this fellow Smith with a white feather this morning. Of course he's a poor half-begotten sort of creature, but

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as far as one can see there's no reason why he shouldn't be working at munitions instead of loafing about the common."

"Exactly. Sure you won't have a *leetle* more?"

"Quite. Well, if you please, he kissed the feather, stuck it in his buttonhole, and said, 'And lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.'"

The doctor shook a grave, gray head. "Sounds decidedly cracked, I must say. At any rate a most improper speech to make to a clergyman's daughter."

"I should think so! Outrageous blasphemy!"

"Do you suppose the chap meant to insult her?"

"If he didn't, and it's charitable to give him the benefit of the doubt, his behavior only admits of one other explanation."

Dr. Joliffe sat, a picture of perplexity. To a severely literal mind the speech was meaningless. He had known for some time that the man claimed to see visions, that he was a poet and a dreamer; and the doctor had lately heard rumors, to which he had paid little attention, that the man was dabbling in Christian Science in neighboring villages; but this was the first time it had occurred to him that the fellow was in-

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sane. But now the doctor agreed with the vicar that such behavior strongly suggested that condition.

"Mind you, that is not all." And the vicar gave an account of his own visit to the common, his conversation with the man, his subsequent visit to the mother and the remarkable statement she had made to him.

"She has always been very religious," said the doctor, "but up till now I have not questioned her sanity."

"Nor I," said the vicar. "But she is not important. She is practically bed-ridden. It is this son of hers we have to think about. I have already made up my mind that he must go. And that being the case, the problem arises as to what is the best means of getting rid of him."

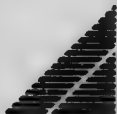
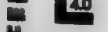
Dr. Joliffe, a worldly-wise man within his sphere, stroked his chin solemnly but offered no advice.

"Of course," said the vicar, "it is in the public interest that whatever steps we may take should not excite attention. It is sufficiently disagreeable to have that sort of lunatic in one's parish, without having busybodies and maliciously inclined people making a fuss. The readiest and simplest means, no doubt, would be to institute a prosecution for blasphemy. He would most certainly be detained during his



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Majesty's pleasure. But such a proceeding might play into the hands of the enemies of the Established Church, in which, unfortunately, the country seems to abound. We might have Voltaires arising in the Cocoa Press or something equally revolting."

"Quite so, vicar." Dr. Joliffe compressed his lips. "You'll be wise to go slow in a matter of this kind, believe me, or you might easily find public opinion against you."

"As though one cared *that* for public opinion." The vicar snapped heroic fingers. "Still, I see your point. And broadly speaking, I agree with it. Now to pass to the second alternative. The man said to me—let me give his precise words if I can—'At two o'clock this morning a presence entered my room and said, "I am Goethe and I have come to pray for Germany." And I answered him, "Certainly I shall be very glad to pray for Germany," and we knelt and prayed together; and then he arose and I embraced him and he showed me the little town with its gables and turrets where he sleeps at night and then he left me, promising to return.'"

"Perfectly preposterous," said the doctor. "I quite agree that the man ought to be locked up. But of course he doesn't intend to be taken literally. Obviously it is his idea of a poetic fancy."

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"No doubt. But a man must be taught to curb such poetic fancies in a time like the present. Now the point which arises"—the vicar raised a dogmatic forefinger—"is that a person who makes such statements in public renders himself amenable to the Defense of the Realm Regulations. And there is no doubt that any bench of magistrates that knew its business would know how to deal with him."

"Personally, I'm not altogether clear that they would," said Dr. Joliffe cautiously. "I agree with you, of course, that a man who talks in that way needs a strait waistcoat—one wonders what would happen to a man in Germany who went about saying he was praying for England! At the same time one ought not to forget that nowadays even the county bench is not composed exclusively of people as clear-sighted as you and I."

"That is so, I am afraid. Even the county bench is getting fearfully mixed. Timson, the Brombridge grocer, is the latest addition, by the way. But I see your point. In such an absurd country as this one couldn't depend on the man being dealt with in the way that he deserves. That's where the enemy with its wonderful internal administration has such an advantage. Their system has much to recommend it in war time—or in any other if it comes to that."

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Dr. Joliffe agreed. "We have much to learn from them in the handling of the masses."

"Ah, well, Joliffe," said the vicar hopefully, "we shall learn many things if this war goes on long enough."

"I am convinced that the only way to down Prussia is to adopt Prussia's methods."

"However," said the vicar briskly, "we have not come to them yet. Therefore we can't rely on the county bench doing its duty in the matter, although I hate having to say so. And that brings us to alternative the third, which is, Joliffe, that this man, John Smith, must be put away privately—for the good of the community."

This taking of the bull by the horns was followed by a pause on the part of the doctor. He was an admirer of the vicar's thorough-goingness, he was in full sympathy with the main premises of his argument, but he was a conscientious man. And he had a clear perception of the difficulties inherent in the process of confining a lunatic.

At last Dr. Joliffe broke a dubious silence. "To begin with, vicar, you will have to get two doctors to certify the chap insane, and then you will have to get two magistrates to sign a warrant for his removal."

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"I know that," said the vicar. "And I am fully prepared to do it. But to begin with, Joliffe, I must have your help in the matter."

"I am willing to give it of course. It's one's duty."

"Then I shall ask you to certify him at once."

Dr. Joliffe hesitated. A cloud of indecision came on his face. "Before I do that," he said very slowly, "I should like the opinion of someone who has more knowledge of mental disease than I pretend to."

"But, my dear fellow," said the vicar rather surprisedly, "after what I have told you aren't you already convinced that the fellow is insane?"

"Insanity is a complicated subject," said the cautious Joliffe. "A very much more complicated subject than the layman appreciates."

The vicar, at heart an autocrat, began to bristle at once. Scenting contradiction in the quarter where he had least expected to find it, he grew suddenly impatient. "But even a layman knows," he said in a tone of authority, "that insanity on one point is insanity on all."

"Just so."

"Well, that is already proved."

"I shall not gainsay it. But a general practitioner is naturally cautious—it is his duty to be so—in a matter of this kind. Let me suggest that we have the

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opinion of a mental specialist before we commit ourselves to any line of action."

In the opinion of Mr. Perry-Hennington this was perilously like a display of moral cowardice, but from a purely professional standpoint it might not be unreasonable. All the mental specialists of Harley Street would not alter the fact that the man was insane—it was the only charitable assumption. At the same time, Joliffe's request was quite easy to understand.

"By all means." The vicar's tone of assent implied that he had to deal with a timid fellow. "We'll consult anyone you please. Of course, only one opinion is possible, but if you feel it will help and strengthen you in your duty don't let us hesitate. By all means let us have someone down at once."

"I am sure it is the proper course to take."

"Very well. Who shall it be? Not necessarily a man in the first flight who will want a large fee, which I'm afraid will have to come out of my pocket instead of out of the Treasury. Not that I shall grudge it, whatever it may be. Still, the case is so clear that somebody local, such a man as Parker of Brombridge, will not have the slightest difficulty in certifying him." The vicar gazed fixedly at Joliffe. "Yes—shall we say Parker? He'll be at the meeting this afternoon. I'll speak to him. We ought to move without delay.

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The fellow ought not to be at large a day longer than we can help. Yes—Dr. Parker—this afternoon. Get him over on Monday. And this evening I'm dining with Whymper and Lady Jane—I'll mention it to Whymper. All to the good to get the local bench interested without delay."

Dr. Joliffe nodded. But somehow he looked a little dubious.

"I think, Mr. Perry-Hennington," he said rather uneasily, "we ought to be very careful to satisfy ourselves that it is a bona fide case of paranoia."

"Certainly, certainly. I fully agree."

"I've no objection to meeting Parker, of course, but I should welcome a London opinion if it is possible to arrange for one. You see, this is rather a serious matter."

The vicar thought so too. "But personally, I have every confidence in Parker's judgment. I remember some years ago when my eldest boy George had a murrain, Parker diagnosed it at once as a case of measles. I've always found him quite sound personally."

"I've not a word to say against him, I cast no doubt upon his competence, but this is one of those delicate things which it hardly seems right, if you'll excuse

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my saying so, to leave entirely to local practitioners whose experience must necessarily be limited."

"Joliffe, I hope you are not hedging," said the vicar sternly.

"No, I am not hedging. But, as I say, this is a ticklish matter."

The vicar shook a pontifical head. "For the life of me," he said, "I can't see that it is more ticklish than any other matter. Had there been a doubt in the case one might have thought so. But the man is as mad as a hatter. A child could tell that who heard him talk as he talked to me this morning on the common."

"No doubt you are right. But he has not yet aired these particular views to me, you know."

"Then you've evidently not talked to him on his particular subject."

"Evidently not."

"Wait till you do, my friend! In the meantime I'll mention the matter to Parker at the meeting and get him over on Monday to see him."

Further conversation on the thorny subject was forbidden for the time being by the reappearance of Mrs. Small, who had to inform her master that the boy was round with the car. Thereupon Dr. Joliffe looked at his watch and declared that they must start at once if they were to be at Brombridge by three.

VIII

THE timed journey to Brombridge in the doctor's runabout was forty minutes with reasonable driving. On the way both gentlemen were rather silent. By tacit consent John Smith was dismissed for the time being, and they were able to confine themselves to the prospect for potatoes, war in its relation to agriculture, the loss of tonnage, and hearty abuse of the government. For the true Briton, that unfortunate institution vies with that equally unfortunate institution, the weather, in supplying the theme of a never-ending jeremiad. All worthy of their salt, irrespective of creed or party, damn these miserable makeshifts impartially. At the moment the vicar and the doctor drove up to the Assembly Rooms, Brombridge, they were in cordial agreement that only one thing under divine providence could hope to make the British people lose the war, and that thing was the British Government.

By a graceful little act on the part of coincidence—most charming of the minor goddesses!—Dr. Parker was about to ascend the steps of the building just as

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the car of Dr. Joliffe drew up by the curb. The vicar hailed the leading physician of Brombridge promptly and heartily.

"The very man we want to see." Mr. Perry-Hennington was one of the fortunate people who act first and do their thinking afterward.

Dr. Parker, an elderly, florid, bewhiskered, important-looking personage, stopped at once, turned about and gave the reverend gentleman the full benefit of his politest smile and his best bow. He then let his eyes pass to the second occupant of the car, fully prepared to let them infold a county magnate. Somehow Mr. Perry-Hennington always contrived to dispense an atmosphere of county magnates, or at least to live in the odor of their sanctity. But as soon as Dr. Parker saw who it was who had had the honor of conveying the vicar of Penfold to the meeting the polite smile and the ceremonious bow were merged almost magically in a brief nod and a gesture bearing a perilous resemblance to a scowl.

The truth was, Dr. Parker had a poor opinion of Dr. Joliffe, and Dr. Joliffe had a poor opinion of Dr. Parker. If pressed upon the point, Dr. Parker would solemnly confess that Dr. Joliffe was the biggest tufthunter in Kent, and Dr. Joliffe, also under

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duress, would return that singularly comprehensive compliment.

This was perhaps a pity. Both were good men, both were honest men, but like so many people, otherwise quite admirable, their sense of vision was not acute. Nodosities of character in their neighbors were apt to overshadow the central merit. In this case it was not so much a question of professional jealousy as a matter of social rivalry. The root of the trouble was that Dr. Joliffe and Dr. Parker were a little too much alike.

Dr. Parker was clearly gratified at being the very man whom the vicar of Penfold wanted to see, but carefully dissembled his feelings while Mr. Perry-Hennington stepped out of the car and buttonholed him rather ostentatiously on the steps of the council chamber. The vicar had to suggest that they should hold a little conference after the meeting in regard to a matter of importance. Certainly they were not in a position to hold it at the moment. Fellow members of the War Economy Committee were rolling up in surprising numbers; weird old landowners in wonderful vehicles, local J. P.'s, retired stockbrokers, civil servants, city men, and very *affairé* ladies.

For all of these the parson of Penfold had a greeting. With his tall, thin, aristocratic figure, his dis-

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tinguished air, his large, fleshy, important nose, he was the kind of man who dominates every company he enters. And it was so entirely natural to him to do so that no one ever thought of resenting it. He was not a clever man, a witty man, nor was tact his long suit, moreover he was apt to give himself airs, but for some reason or combination of reasons, he was greatly respected, generally looked up to and almost universally popular. He seemed to carry equal weight at Gleave Castle, the Mount Olympus of the local cosmos, and at the board of guardians. The acid people who dissect our naïve and charming human nature might have said that it was for no better reason than that the vicar of Penfold was a born busybody, doubly blessed with a loud voice, and a total absence of humor, but the good and the credulous who take things on trust and form a working majority in every republic always declared "it was because he was such a gentleman."

By sheer pressure of human character, Mr. Perry-Hennington took a seat next the chairman of the meeting in the council chamber. And when that almost incredibly distinguished personage, a rather pathetic and extremely inaudible old thing in red mitens, got on to his legs, the vicar of Penfold could be heard rendering him very audible assistance in the

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course of his opening remarks. But it seemed entirely right and proper that it should be so. And nobody resented it, not even the old boy in the red mittens, who had retired from county business years ago, but who, as the master of Gleave, was fully determined to do his bit toward winning the war like everybody else.

The Clerk of the Committee, a rising Brombridge solicitor, had to submit to correction from the parson of Penfold, once when the Clerk was entirely in the right, once when he may have been wrong, but on a point so delicate that ordinary people would never have noticed it, and even if they had would hardly have thought it worth while to hold up the tide of human affairs in order to discuss it. Still, it was Mr. Perry-Hennington's way and ordinary people admired it. Even Lady Jane Whymper, who was very far from being an ordinary person, and who was seated at the other side of the Chairman, admired it. The vicar of Penfold was such a dear man and he got things done.

This afternoon, however, the War Economy Committee would have transacted the same amount of business in at least twenty minutes less time had the vicar of Penfold been in the seclusion of his study grappling with his sermon. Still, that didn't occur to anybody;

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and it would have been ungenerous to harbor the thought. The vicar of Penfold was an acknowledged ornament of any assembly he chose to enter and no gathering of this kind could have been complete without him. Everybody was amazingly in earnest, but Mr. Perry-Hennington was the most earnest of all. He made a number of suggestions, not one of which, after discussion, the Committee felt able to adopt, but the general effect of his presence was to give an air of life and virility to the proceedings.

After the meeting, the vicar staved off Lady Jane, with whom he had promised to dine that evening, and tactfully withdrew from the distinguished circle around the chairman in order to confer with Dr. Parker at the other end of the long table.

Dr. Parker, if rather flattered by this attention, was also a little perplexed by it. For one thing, Dr. Joliffe was scowling at him from the other end of the room. So little love was lost between these warriors that they never met in consultation if they could possibly help it. The vicar, however, had quite made up his mind that they should meet on Monday. He declined to give details, but maintained an air of reticence and mystery; yet he dropped a final hint that the matter was of immense importance, not merely to individuals but to the state.

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Dr. Parker, having mounted gold eyeglasses and consulted his diary, consented in his dignified way to lunch at the vicarage on Monday. Thereupon Mr. Perry-Hennington thanked him with equal dignity and returned to Penfold in Dr. Joliffe's car.

IX

NOT altogether pleased with the turn of events, Dr. Joliffe drove the vicar home. He was a conscientious man, and he had no more confidence in "that fool Parker," than Dr. Parker had in "that fool Joliffe." Still, the vicar could not be expected to know that. On the way back to Penfold he was inclined to congratulate himself. Machinery had been set in motion which could hardly fail to deal effectively with John Smith.

Dr. Joliffe was gloomy. All the way home he confined himself to polite monosyllables, and kept his eyes glued to the steering wheel of the car. Hitherto he had not had occasion to question the sanity of John Smith, whom he had always regarded as a particularly harmless creature. And even if the vicar had reported the man correctly, Dr. Joliffe was by no means clear that Mr. Perry-Hennington was not taking an extreme view of his duty.

The vicar, however, had not a doubt in the matter. A sermon unprepared still cast its shadow over him, but a cloud had lifted from his mind. A sanguine man

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endowed with great animal energy, he never questioned the logic of his own views, the soundness of his judgment, or the absolute rectitude of his conduct. It was in the interests of the community that John Smith should be taken care of. It even gave the vicar a certain satisfaction that his duty in a most disagreeable matter should now stand out clearly before him.

Mr. Perry-Hennington had only just time to drink a cup of tea at the vicarage before he was off on his travels again. This time his objective was Grayfield, a feudal sort of hamlet over on the Sussex side. He had to speak at a recruiting meeting, arranged by his old Magdalen friend Whymper, with whom a distinguished member of parliament was spending the weekend.

Edith accompanied her father in the gig; and they had been invited to dine at the manor after the meeting. Grayfield was a good hour for old Alice, upon whom Anno Domini had set an unmistakable seal. But it was a rare evening for a drive. The sweet, clean air of the Sussex uplands was like a mellow wine; the road was straight and firm; the sun of June still lingered over Ashdown; trees and hedges wore a sheen of glory, with a trim farm or a cowled oasthouse nestling here and there. This calm and quiet land

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with its mathematically parceled acres, its placid cows and horses looking over five-barred gates to watch the stately progress of old Alice, its occasional forelock-pulling rustic, was like a "set" in a theater. The whole scene was so snug, so perfect, so ordained, that nature appeared to have very little part to play in it.

"Odd to think that Armageddon is *here*," said the vicar.

Edith thought it was, very.

The vicar gave a shake of the reins to encourage old Alice. And then he said: "It's my firm belief that there are people on this countryside who don't realize it even yet."

"I'm sure there are," said Edith.

"It will be brought home to every man, every woman, every child in the land before we are through with it."

"You think so?" said Edith, in the curious, precise voice she had inherited from the Henningtons. "Personally I am not so sure. We are much too secure here. I sometimes think that an invasion would be the best thing that could happen to us."

"I am inclined to agree with you," said her father, with another shake for old Alice. "But it's gradually coming home to the nation. Rather than give in we shall fight to the last man and the last shilling, and

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unless they have altered since the days of Frederick the Great they will do the same."

"But it can't go on indefinitely. It means extermination."

"The end of civilization at any rate," said the vicar mournfully. "The clock has already been put back a century."

"Sooner or later something must surely happen."

"But what can happen? We don't begin to look like downing them, and it's unthinkable that they can down us."

"There's God," said Edith, in a voice of sudden, throbbing softness. "I'm convinced that He must put an end to it soon."

Before the vicar continued the conversation he gave Alice a little touch of the whip.

"Have you ever thought, my dear girl, what an awful weight of sin there is upon the human race? Instead of expecting God to put an end to it soon, it will be little short of miraculous if He ever puts an end to it at all."

"But think of the awful suffering which falls for the most part on those who are the least to blame."

"There is Biblical precedent for all that has happened, nay for far more than has happened. It is a

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judgment on the world, and the innocent have to suffer with the guilty."

Edith was silent a little while.

"It all seems so horribly unfair," she said at last, in a deep, palpitating tone which the vicar had not heard her use before. "It is not the people who have made the war who are really suffering by it."

"They who question!" and the vicar shook up old Alice yet again.

A long silence followed, through which old Alice jogged in her placid way. Hardly a ripple stirred the evening air. It was very difficult to realize what was happening within a hundred miles.

I can't help thinking of that man," Edith suddenly remarked.

"What man?" said her father. For the moment his thoughts were far away. An unwritten sermon was looming up at the back of his brain.

"John Smith. I can't tell you what a curious impression he has left upon me. Somehow I have done nothing but think of him ever since the thing happened."

It was a wrench for the vicar to quit the sequence of ideas which was being formed so painfully in his mind. And for the time he had had quite enough of the subject of John Smith, nay, was in process of

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suffering a reaction from it. Besides it was such a vexatiously disagreeable matter that he had no wish to discuss it more than was absolutely necessary.

"I should forget the man if I were you," was his counsel to Edith.

"Somehow I can't. He's made a most curious impression upon me. I begin to feel now that I had no right to take for granted that what he said was meant for blasphemy."

The vicar dissented forcibly. "There can be no possible excuse for him. It was a most improper remark for any man to make in such circumstances, and you were quite right to feel as you did about it. But if you are wise you will now put it out of your mind; at the same time I should like you to give up the practice of distributing feathers."

"Yes, father, I will," said Edith with a quick flush.

"You will be wise. I am arranging for an inquiry to be made into the man's mental condition."

"Is that absolutely necessary?" The flush grew deeper.

"The public interest calls for it. This incident is a climax of many."

"Yet somehow he doesn't seem exactly insane."

"Not even when he talks in that way?" said the

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vicar surprisedly. "My dear girl, it is the only charitable explanation."

"Do you really think so?" said the reluctant Edith.
"Demonstrably."

"And yet somehow, when one really thinks about him, he seems so sweetly reasonable."

"Sweetly reasonable!" The vicar pinned down the unfortunate phrase. "How can you say that? A mild and harmless creature, perhaps—apart from his opinions—but reasonable!—surely that is the very last word to apply to him."

Perplexity deepened upon Edith's face. "Somehow, I can't throw off the curious impression he has left upon me."

"Try to forgive the man." The vicar spoke sternly.

"Dismiss him from your thoughts, at any rate while the case is *sub judice*. You have done your duty by reporting the matter to me, and I am doing mine by putting in motion proper machinery to deal with it."

"I sincerely hope that nothing is going to happen to him."

"He will be sent to an asylum."

Edith shivered. "Oh, I hope not," she said, drawing in her breath sharply. "To my mind that is the cruellest fate that can overtake any human being."

"One doesn't altogether agree," said the vicar. "He

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will be taken care of as he ought to be, and treated, of course, with the greatest humanity. You must remember that asylums are very different places from what they were sixty years ago, when Dickens—I think it was Dickens—wrote about them."

"But it must mean dreadful suffering to be held for the rest of one's life within four walls among lunatics without hope of escape."

"Why should it, if the mind is really unsound? You must remember that such people don't suffer in the way that rational people do."

"But suppose he doesn't happen to be insane?"

"If he doesn't happen to be insane the law cannot confine him as a lunatic."

"Who will decide?"

"He will be certified by two doctors."

Again came silence, only broken by the peaceful plodding of old Alice. And then said Edith suddenly: "Father, whoever certifies John Smith will take an awful responsibility upon himself."

"No doubt," said the vicar. "Yet hardly so grave a one as you might think. It is the only right, reasonable and charitable view to take of him. And if the medical profession cannot be brought to do its clear and obvious duty, the man will have to be dealt with in some other and less gentle way."

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"I am beginning to wish I hadn't spoken of the matter," said Edith, in an anxious tone.

"My dear," said the vicar, shaking up old Alice, "in mentioning it, disagreeable and distressing as it may be, you did no more than your duty. You must now leave other people to do theirs, and at the same time you must have the good sense to dismiss the matter entirely from your thoughts."

Again Edith shivered. But further discussion was forbidden by their journey's end. They had now reached the outskirts of Grayfield, and the gates of the manor were before them.

X

THERE was a very stimulating meeting in the parish room. The squire of Grayfield, the vicar's Magdalen friend, Whymper, was by divine right in the chair. He was a dry, melancholy, exanimate sort of creature; a man of few words and very pronounced dislikes, not without force in a narrow way, but locally of more account as the husband of Lady Jane than from any native quality. Still, he made an excellent chairman. Brief, concise, self-effacing, he loathed his job; anything in the nature of speechifying bored him extremely, and he had a rooted objection "to making an ass of himself in public," but natural grit and a high sense of duty pulled him through. In fact he did his job so well that it would have been hard for any man to improve on his performance.

There were only two speakers. One was the vicar of Penfold, but he was not the person who had filled the parish room to overflowing. A famous member of Parliament, a reputed master of the forensic arts, was spending a week-end at the manor house, and he

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had kindly consented to rouse the young men of the district.

This paladin, who spoke before the vicar, was a tall thin-faced man of forty-five, who hardly looked his age. George Speke by name, he was the kind of man no British government is ever without, and he discoursed the commonest of common sense with an air of ease and authenticity. He put the case for Britain and her allies with a force and a cogency that none could gainsay. And in that room at any rate, there was not the slightest wish to gainsay it. Even the group of young men at the back of the room, upon whom the local constable and two specials kept a vigilant eye, and to whom Mr. Speke's remarks were addressed officially, showed no inclination to traverse his clear statement of historical fact. It was a very finished effort, and somehow it moved his audience.

Mr. Perry-Hennington came rather in the nature of an anticlimax. He had no pretensions to be considered an orator, as he was careful to warn his hearers at the outset; he had nothing to say that had not already been said far better in print, yet he felt it to be his duty to stand on a public platform and declaim obvious truths which the newspapers of the realm had weeks ago made banal and threadbare. But somehow there was a driving force, a contained ferocity

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about Mr. Perry-Hennington's sincerity, trite and ill-phrased as it was, which, with the aid of copious "hear, hear's" from Mr. Speke and his old Magdalen friend, Whympers, first staved off an epidemic of coughing and then of feet-shuffling, and then of coughing again. At last he got fairly into his stride, a strong, unmusical voice increasing in violence as he did so. And as the more violent he grew the more his audience approved, they soon began to march together toward a thrilling climax. Finally he swung into his fine peroration: "We shall not lay down the sword, etc.," which belonged to another, and ended stronger than he began amidst quite a storm of cheering.

It was a mediocre performance, well within the range of any member of the educated classes, yet all who heard it seemed greatly impressed. Even Mr. Whympers and Mr. Speke seemed greatly impressed, and what was of still more importance it went home to a number of young men at the back of the room. When the meeting was over these came forward to the table at the side of the platform, at which a recruiting officer sat, and gave in their names. Nowhere else could such a scene have been enacted. To the ordinary intelligence, it was almost unbelievable that magnificent fellows in the pride of manhood could be moved to the supreme sacrifice by the jejune lu-

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cidities of Mr. Speke, and the brand of spirituality that the vicar of Penfold had to offer. Something must have been in the air of that overheated room. Behind the trite phrases, behind the rather otiose pomposities of the one, the deliberately quiet, over-varnished style of the other, must have been that spirit which, by hardly more than the breadth of a single hair, had temporarily saved civilization for mankind.

XI

AFTER the meeting, eight people sat down to dinner at the manor house. These were Mr. Speke, Mr. Perry-Hennington and his daughter, the host, the redoubtable hostess, and three rather crushed and colorless Miss Whympers, who were evidently in great awe of their mother.

Lady Jane Whympers was a large, humorless woman, a local terror, whom most people found it very hard to like. For one thing her connections were so high, and her family so good, that she never had to please or conciliate anyone, and there was nothing in her nature to lead her to do so. She gave so little thought to the feelings of others, that she always made a point of saying just what came into her head, without regard to time or place or company; moreover it was always said in a voice of an exasperatingly penetrative quality. In her little corner of the world there was no one to stand against her, therefore she could hector, trample and dogmatize to her heart's content. And being a person with many social strings

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to pull, in London also she was able to order the world pretty much to her own liking.

Still even she, if as a general rule she was insufferable, kept a reserve of tact for special occasions. By no means a fool, she could sometimes rise to graciousness; and the knowledge that violence was thereby done to the order of her nature seemed to invest her hours of charm with greater significance. And this evening at dinner, she happened to be in her most winning mood. For one thing George Speke was a favorite of hers; she had also a regard for the vicar of Penfold; thus the augurs had doubly blessed the meal. It was true that Lady Jane reserved her unbendings for the other sex, certainly never for her own, unless she had some very portentous ax to grind; but on the present occasion the three Miss Whympers and their rather mournful and ineffectual sire found the evening much more agreeable than usual.

Speke was a favorite of Lady Jane's for several reasons. To begin with, like herself he was highly connected. It may seem an anachronism that in the year 1915 a woman of the world should attach the slightest importance to such a fortuitous matter, but even at that time a type of mind still survived in the island to which degrees of birth were of vast consequence. Lady Jane owned a mind of that sort. Dear

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George was "next in" for a dukedom, and Lady Jane was a duke's daughter.

Ducal aspect apart, Speke was an able and likable fellow. He had once been described by one who knew the world as a member of a first-rate second-rate family. The Spekes had always been "in it" ever since they had been a family; they ran to prime ministers, field marshals, ambassadors, archbishops, all down the scroll of history. George's particular blend of Speke was an immensely distinguished clan; yet somehow when Clio, the muse, cast her searchlight upon their achievements they loomed far less in the eyes of posterity than in those of their own generation. Ten years before, Mr. Speke's own little world of friends, relations and sponsee bearers, had seen in him a future prime minister. But 1914 had modified their views. All the same a place had been found for him in the Coalition. As Lady Jane said, "We cannot hope to win the war without him."

Speke had no such estimate of his own abilities, or at least, if he had, he knew how to conceal it. He talked modestly and well at the dinner table; his conversation was full of inside knowledge, and it had a grace of manner which Edith and the three Miss Whympers admired. He had met the vicar of Penfold before, and rather liked and respected him as

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most people did; also he claimed him as a distant kinsman, as the Perrys of Molesworth appeared in the Speke family tree.

"By the way, Mr. Perry-Hennington," he said, "I was trespassing in your parish this afternoon. I went to see Gervase Brandon."

"Poor fellow," said the vicar. "But don't you think he is bearing up remarkably?"

"Quite wonderfully. But he's a pathetic figure. Six months ago when I saw him last, he was at the apex of mental and bodily power. And now he lies helpless, never expecting to walk again."

"And yet not a word of complaint," said the vicar. "This morning when I went to see him I was greatly struck by his splendid courage and cheerfulness."

"Truly a hero—and so pathetic as he lies in that room—a wonderful room it is—among his books."

"Can nothing be done for him?" said Lady Jane.

"The doctors are beginning to despair," said the vicar. "Everything that medical science can do has been done already, and there's no sign of an improvement."

"The higher nerve centers, I suppose?"

"So I understand. The mere concussion of this modern artillery is appalling."

"It is amazing to me that the human frame ever

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succeeds in adapting itself to war under modern conditions," said Speke.

"And the awful thing is," the host interposed in his melancholy tones, "that there appears to be no limit to what can be done in the way of self-immolation. The chemist and the inventor have only to go on long enough applying their arts to war to evolve conditions which will destroy the whole human race. We live in a time of horrors, but let us ask ourselves what the world will be twenty years hence?"

"Don't, I implore you, Edward," reproved his wife. "Spare us the thought."

"No, it won't bear speaking about," said Speke. "We are already past the point where science destroys organic life faster than nature can replace."

"Not a doubt of it," said the vicar. "And if we cannot find a means of bridging permanently the chasm that has opened in the life of civilization, the globe will cease to be habitable for the human race."

"Really! really!" said the hostess.

"Only too true," said the host. "There's hardly a limit to what modern devilry can do. Take aviation to begin with. We are merely on the threshold of the subject."

"I agree," said George Speke. "The other day, Bellman, the air minister, told me it is quite within

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the bounds of possibility to drop a poison from the clouds that will exterminate whole cities."

"Which merely goes to prove what I have always contended," said the hostess. "Sooner or later all nations will be forced into an agreement for the abolition of war."

"My dear Lady Jane," said the vicar, shaking a mournful head, "such a contingency is against all experience. It is not to be thought of unless a fundamental change takes place in the heart of man."

"A change must take place," said Lady Jane, "if the human race is to go on. Besides, doesn't the Bible tell us that there will be a second coming of Christ, and that all wars will cease?"

"It does," said the vicar; "but that is the millennium, you know. And I am bound to say there's no sign of it at present. I am convinced that only one thing now can save the human race and that is a second advent. Only that can bridge the chasm which has opened in the life of the nations."

"In the meantime," said George Speke, "the watchers scan the heavens in vain. The miserable, childish futility of our present phase of evolution! So many little groups of brown grubs slaving night and day to make human life a worse hell than nature has made of it already. People talk of the exhilaration of war.

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Good God! they can't have seen it. They can't have seen colonies of organized hatreds, profaning all art and all science, poisoning the very air God gave us to breathe. It makes one loathe one's species. We are little, hideous, two-legged ants, flying around in foul contraptions of our own invention. And to what end? Simply to destroy."

"In order to recreate," said the vicar robustly.

"I don't believe it. The pendulum of progress—blessed word!—has swung too far. Unless we can contrive a means of holding back the clock, the doom of the world is upon us."

"It all comes of denying God, of banishing him from the planet," said the host.

"But is he banished from the planet? Take a man like Gervase Brandon. Life gave him everything. No man had a greater love of peace, yet when the call came he threw to the wind all his most cherished convictions, went to the war in the knightly spirit of a crusader, and for the rest of his days on earth is condemned to a state of existence from which death is a merciful release."

"By sacrifice ye shall enter," said the vicar.

"I am not competent to speak upon that. But one's private conception of God is not banished from this

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corner of the planet as long as England teems with Gervase Brandons."

"There I am fully with you," said the vicar. "To me Gervase Brandon will always be a symbol of what man can rise to in the way of deliberate heroism, just as the beaches of Gallipoli will be enshrined forever in the history of the race to which he belongs. I have only to think of Gervase Brandon to affirm that God is more potent in the world than he ever was—and that is the awful paradox."

"I don't presume to question that," said the host. "But the problem now for the world is, how shall his power be made supreme? That is what a ruined civilization has now to ask itself. All civilized people agree that war itself must cease, yet before it can do so there will have to be a conversion of the heart of man."

"You are right," said Speke, in his dry, cool voice. "And to my mind, as the world is constituted, the problem admits of no solution."

"In other words," said the host, "there must always be wars and rumors of wars until God has created Himself."

"Or rather let us say," the vicar rejoined, "until God has affirmed Himself. Hence the need for the second advent."

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"I wonder if we shall realize it when it occurs," said Speke, his hand straying to his champagne glass. "In all its fundamentals the world is as it was two thousand years ago in Palestine. If Christ walked the earth again, it is certain that he would be treated now as he was then."

"That, one cannot believe," interposed Lady Jane with ready vehemence. "Even you admit, George, the amount of practical Christianity there is in the world. I, for one, will not believe all this sacrifice has been in vain."

"I agree with you, Lady Jane," said the vicar. "When He comes to resume His ministry, as come He will, at all events He will find that His Church has been true. But at present, I confess, one looks in vain for a sign of His advent."

Speke shook his head. "With all submission," he said, "if Christ appeared today he would be treated as a harmless crank, or he would be put in an asylum. Think of his reception by the yellow press—the ruler of nations, the maker of governments, the welder of empires. He would find it the same pleasant world he left two thousand years ago. Man, in sum, the vocal working majority, whether in London, Paris, Berlin, New York, or Petrograd, could not possibly

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meet the Master face to face or even hope to recognize him when he passed by."

"That is true, no doubt," said the vicar, "of the mass of the people. Men of truly spiritual mold are in a hopeless minority. But they are still among us. Depend upon it, when the hour comes they will recognize the Master's voice, depend upon it, they will know His face."

"I wonder?" said George Speke.

"I am absolutely convinced of that, George." And Lady Jane, one with the law and the prophets, gave the signal to the ladies and rose superbly from the dinner table.

XII

WHEN the ladies had left the room the vicar took the chair on the right of his host, and then he said across the table to George Speke: "Talking of poor Brandon, what opinion did you form of him mentally when you saw him this afternoon?"

"Mentally. . . . I thought him rather wonderful."

The eyes of the vicar searched those of the man opposite. If this was a conventional statement it was the clear desire of those eyes to expose it.

"The poise of his mind seemed to me perfect. And somehow one hadn't quite expected it."

"You felt he was in full possession of his whole mental faculty?"

"Didn't you?"

The vicar's failure to answer the question might be taken for a negative.

"Moreover, he greatly impressed me," Speke added. There were two George Spekes. One had the departmental mind; the other was something more considerable than a rather arid public record indicated. "I always knew that he had a very first-rate intellect,

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but this afternoon it was even more striking than usual."

"But," said the vicar cautiously, "don't you think it may be misleading him?"

"How? In what way?"

"I will give you a concrete instance of what I mean." The vicar spoke very gravely. "And by the way, Whymper, it is a matter I want to talk to you about particularly. At Penfold, we are cursed with a sort of village ne'er-do-well, who has taken to writing poetry, blaspheming the Creator, and upholding the cause of the enemy. I am sorry to say that for some years now Brandon has been this man's friend, lent him books from his private collection, helped to support him, and so on. Well, this morning, when I went to Hart's Ghyll, Brandon told me that he had lately read a poem of this fellow John Smith's, and that it had made a very deep impression upon him."

"That's interesting," said Speke. "He told me the same. He said that a young man who lived in the village had lately produced the most wonderful poem he had ever read."

"On the face of it, didn't that strike you as nonsense?"

"No, not in the way that Brandon said it. He spoke

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as one having authority; and in the matter of poetry, he is thought, I believe, to have a good deal."

"It may be so. But one mustn't forget that in this case he is claiming semidivine honors for a half-educated, wholly mad village wastrel."

"Mad?"

"So mad that we are having to arrange for him to be taken care of."

"But surely such a man as Brandon could hardly be deceived by one of that caliber! He gave chapter and verse. He said that John Smith was a great clairvoyant, who had more windows open in his soul than other people."

"Didn't it strike you as a fantastic statement?"

"Why should it? I haven't seen the poem, and he . . . as; I don't know John Smith and he does. Why should it strike one as a fantastic statement?"

"No, of course, you couldn't be expected to know that John Smith is as mad as a hatter. But Brandon should know that as well as I do."

"He says the man's inspired—*Gottbetrunken* was the word he used."

"The man is a blasphemer and an atheist, and a pro-German to boot. And, as I say, steps are being taken to put him in a place of safety. We shall need *your* help, Whymper; there'll be a magistrates' order

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for you to sign presently. But the distressing thing is that such a mind as Gervase Brandon's should be susceptible to the man's claptrap. The only explanation that occurs to one is that the poor dear fellow's brain is going."

"Well, I can only say that there seemed no trace of it this afternoon. I'll admit that I thought him a little exalted, a little more the seer and the visionary than one quite liked to see him. But after all he must have walked pretty close with God. If a man gives up all the fair and easy things of life to storm the beaches of Gallipoli, it is not unlikely that a corner of the prophet's mantle may be found for him—even if one agrees that it is a rather uncomfortable vestment."

"There may be something in what you say." The vicar shook a sad, unconvinced head. "But we have to deal with the thing as it exists. We have to look the facts in the face."

"But what are the facts—that the poet bears the prosaic name of John Smith, that he belongs to the charming village of Penfold, and that he is an atheist."

"A blasphemer and a pro-German, and that circumstances have made it necessary to inquire into his mental condition. His recent conduct in the village has

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made him amenable to the Blasphemy Laws and the Defense of the Realm Regulations."

"Does Brandon know this?"

"Unfortunately he does. And that is why one is compelled to take such a gloomy view of the poor dear fellow at the present time."

"Very odd," said George Speke.

"Very tragic," said the vicar.

XIII

IT was nearly midnight when old Alice turned in at the vicarage gate. Having handed her to the care of his man-of-all-work, the ancient Hobson, who was sitting up for her, the vicar said good-night to Edith and then went to his study. He had had a particularly trying day, and a man of less strength of will would have been content for this to be its end. But he could not bring himself to go to bed while that page of an accusing emptiness lay upon his blotting pad. It was within five minutes of Sunday and his sermon was hardly begun.

The clock on the chimneypiece struck the hour. The vicar turned up his reading lamp and sat down at his desk. He was really very tired and heart-sore, but for many a long year he had not failed in his pastoral duty, and he was not going to fail now. There was one line already traced in a bold, firm hand on the sheet before him. "Let us cast off the works of darkness, let us put on the armor of light."

The words came upon him with a shock of surprise. He could not remember having written them. And

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at this moment, weary in body and spirit, he was not able to meet their implication. Overborne by the weight of an unintelligible world, he was unequal to their message. He drew his pen through them and wrote: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. I will repay." It was lower, easier ground for a man tired and dispirited, and, after all, it was the ideal text for wartime. He had preached from it many times already, but in that hour it seemed the only one for his mood.

Yes, such a vengeance had come upon the world as had been long predicted. Once more those prophetic words glowed on the page with a living fire: "There shall be wars and rumors of war." Terrible, ancient phrases, vibrating with emotion, came with a subliminal uprush into his mind. How miraculously had the Word been fulfilled. But one thing was needed to complete the tale, and that the far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves.

But, the vicar asked, as phrases and thoughts of his own began to take shape, was this Second Coming to be regarded as a literal fact of the physical world, was it only to be regarded by the eye of faith, or was it merely the figment of a poet's fancy? It behooved the world of men to search its heart. Let all face the

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question that the time-spirit was asking; let all face it fully, frankly, fearlessly.

The Christ was overdue. In the opinion of many, if civilization, if humanity was to continue, there must be a divine intervention. These organized and deepening hatreds were destroying the soul of the world. Even average sensual men had come to realize this vital need. But—the vicar began to gnaw the stump of his pen furiously—an age that had ceased to believe in miracles was now crying out for a miracle to happen.

"O ye of little faith," wrote the vicar as the first subheading of his great theme. Only a miracle could now save a world that had so long derided them. The vicar wrote the word Nemesis, and then in brackets, "Terrible word—retributive justice."

Yes, the only hope remaining for a blood-soaked world was to accept the miracle of the Incarnation. And to accept that miracle was to affirm the second advent.

How will He come? The vicar left a space on the slowly filling page, and then wrote his question in the form of a second subheading. How will He appear to us, this Christ of pity, and purity, and peace? Would the heavens open, as the Book of Revelation had foretold; would the King of the World emerge

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from the clouds to the blowing of trumpets, crowned in a chariot? Or would He come as a spirit on the face of the waters? Who should say? But come He must, because of the promise He had made.

"The duty of faith in this present hour," wrote the vicar, as a third subheading. It was a man's duty to reject the carpings of science and the machinations of modern denial. He must believe where he could not prove. The vicar wrote in brackets, "It is very difficult to do that in an age of skepticism."

"The watchers." The vicar drew a line under his fourth subheading. All men must stand as upon a tower, their eyes fixed on the far horizon, in the hope that they might see in the eastern sky the herald of a new heaven and a new earth. And by that portent, which was the light of sublime truth, must they learn to know the Master when He came among them. But only the faithful could hope to do that.

"The danger of His coming to a world in which none should know Him," was the final clause of the vicar's sermon. That would be the supreme tragedy.

The sudden striking of the clock on the chimney-piece startled the vicar. "Four o'clock!" he said. And he went to bed.

XIV

MR. PERRY-HENNINGTON was troubled by many things, but he was tired out by his long day and fell asleep at once. He was still sleeping when Prince, the parlor maid, brought him a cup of tea at a quarter to seven. Another trying day was upon him. He had to take three services, and to give the children's address in a neighboring parish in the afternoon. A hard but uninspired worker, he never flinched from his duty, but did the task next him. It pleased him to think that he got things done, and, like all men of his type, never allowed himself to doubt for a moment that they were worth the doing.

At the morning service Mr. Perry-Hennington preached a sermon that had done duty on many occasions. It was his custom to keep the new discourse for the evening, when the congregation was larger as a rule. "He came to His own and His own knew him not," was the text of the morning homily. It had always been one of his favorites, and every time he rendered it he found some new embroidery to weave

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upon that poignant theme. And this morning, in the emotional stress of a recent event which lurked a shadow at the back of his thoughts, his mind played upon it with a vigor that surprised even himself. He was at his best. Such a feeling of power came upon him as he had seldom known.

While the last hymn was being sung the vicar's eyes strayed to the back of the church. He was surprised and a little disconcerted to see John Smith standing there. The young man was singing heartily, and as the bright rays from the window fell upon his face it became a center of light. Yet that unexpected presence cast a shadow across the vicar's mind. It was as if a cloud had suddenly darkened the sun.

At the end of the service Mr. Perry-Hennington was the last to leave the church. By the time he had taken off his vestments the small congregation had dispersed. But one member of it still lingered near the lich gate, at the end of the churchyard, and as the vicar came down the path this person stopped him. A rather odd-looking man wearing a white hat, he gave the vicar an impression of being overdressed, but his strong face had an individuality that would have commanded notice anywhere.

This man, who had been scanning the tombstones in the churchyard, had evidently stayed behind to

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to speak to the vicar. Yet he was a total stranger to the neighborhood, whose presence among his flock Mr. Perry-Hennington had noted that morning for the first time. At the vicar's slow approach the man in the white hat came forward with a hearty outstretched hand.

"Delighted to meet you, sir," he said.

To the conventional mind of the vicar this was a very unconventional greeting on the part of one he had not seen before; and he took the proffered hand with an air of reserve.

"Allow me to congratulate you on your discourse," said the stranger in an idiom which struck the vicar as rather unusual. "It was first-rate. And I'm a judge. I think I am anyway." The man in the white hat spoke in such a cool, simple, forthcoming manner, that the vicar was nonplused. And yet there was such a charm about him that even a spirit in pontificalibus could hardly resent it.

"Ah, I see," said the stranger, noting the vicar's stiffening of attitude with an amused eye, "you are waiting for an introduction. Well, I'm a neighbor, the new tenant of Longwood."

"Oh, really," said the vicar. The air of constraint lightened a little, but it was too heavy to vanish at once. "I am glad to meet you."

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"Let me give you a card." The new neighbor suddenly dived into a hidden recess of a light gray frock coat, and whipped out a small case.

Mr. Perry-Hennington with a leisureliness half reluctant, and in almost comic contrast to the stranger's freedom of gesture, accepted the card, disentangled his eyeglasses from his pectoral cross, and read it carefully. It bore the inscription: Mr. Gazelee Payne Murdwell, 94 Fifth Avenue, New York.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Murdwell," said the vicar, with a note of reassurance coming into his tone. "Allow me to welcome you among us." The voice, in its grave sonority, rose almost to a point. It didn't quite achieve it, but the fact that the man was an American and also the new tenant of Longwood accounted for much. For the vicar was already quite sure that he didn't belong to the island. The native article could not have had that particular manner, nor could it have dressed in that particular way, nor could it have shown that extraordinary, half quizzical self-security. A new man from the city might have achieved the white hat (with modifications), the gray frock coat, the white waistcoat, the white spats, the wonderful checked cravat, but he could not have delivered a frontal attack on an obviously reverend and honorable gentleman, for long generations indigenous to the soil

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of the county, on the threshold of his own parish church.

"Now look here, vicar," said Gazelee Payne Murdwell, with an easy note of intimacy, "you and I have got to know one another. And it has got to be soon. This is all new to me." Mr. Murdwell waved a jeweled and romantic hand, a fine gesture, which included a part of Kent, a part of Sussex, a suggestion of Surrey, and even a suspicion of Hampshire. "And I'm new to you. As I figure you out at the moment, even allowing a liberal discount for the state of Europe, you are rather like a comic opera"—the vicar drew in his lips primly—"and as you figure me out, if looks mean anything, I'm fit for a Mappin Terrace at the Zoo. But that's a wrong attitude. We've got to come together. And the sooner the better, because you are going to find me a pretty good neighbor."

"I have not the least doubt of that, Mr.—er—Murdwell," said the vicar, glancing deliberately and augustly at the card in his hand.

"Well, as a guaranty of good intentions on both sides, suppose you and your daughter dine at Longwood on Wednesday? I am a bachelor at the moment, but Juley—my wife—and Bud—my daughter—will be down by then."

"Wednesday!" The vicar's left eyebrow was mo-

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bilized in the form of a slight frown. But the invitation had come so entirely unawares that unless he pleaded an engagement which didn't exist, and his conscience therefore would not have sanctioned, there really seemed no way of escape.

"You will? Wednesday. A quarter to eight. That's bully." And in order to clinch the matter, Mr. Murdwell slipped an arm through the vicar's, and slowly accompanied him as far as the vicarage gate.

XV

MANY things, however, had to happen in the parish before Mr. Perry-Hennington could dine at Longwood on Wednesday. And the first of them in the order of their occurrence was an inquiry of Edith's at the Sunday luncheon in regard to their new neighbor.

"A most curious man has just waylaid me," the vicar said. "An American, who says he has taken Longwood."

"Oh, yes," said Edith, in her precise voice. "The odd-looking man in church this morning, I suppose?"

"He gave me his card." The vicar produced the card, and requested Prince, the parlor maid, to hand it to Miss Edith. "He insists on our dining at Longwood on Wednesday. It seems only neighborly to do so."

"Immensely rich, I believe," said Edith, scanning the card at her leisure, with the aid of a pair of tortoise shell spectacles, which she wore with considerable effect.

"Who is he? What is he?" There might, or there

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might not have been a slight accession of interest to the vicar's tone.

"Lady Tyrwhitt was talking about him the other day. He is a great American inventor, the discoverer of Murdwell's Law."

"Ah-h," said the vicar, intelligently. But Murdwell's Law was a sealed book to him.

"Immensely important scientific fact, I believe," Edith explained. "Lady Tyrwhitt seems to know all about it. I couldn't grasp it myself. I only know that Lady Tyrwhitt says it is going to revolutionize everything."

"Ah-h!" said the vicar.

"It has something to do with radioactivity I believe, and the liberation of certain electrons in the ether. That may not be exactly correct. I only know that it is something extremely scientific. Lady Tyrwhitt says Mr. Murdwell is tremendously pro-Ally, and that he is over to help us win the war."

"Oh-h!" said the vicar. "He seems an uncommonly interesting man."

"A very wonderful person. Lady Tyrwhitt says he is one of the most remarkable men living. And she says he is never out of sight of private detectives, because of the number of attempts that have been made on his life."

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"I shall look forward to meeting him again on Wednesday."

Before Wednesday came, however, the vicar had much else to think about. Ever in the forefront of his mind was the vexatious matter of John Smith. It had been arranged that on the next day, Monday, Dr. Parker should come out from Brombridge, lunch at the vicarage, and then, if possible, interview the young man.

On Monday morning the vicar made a preliminary survey of the ground. He went down to the village, and had a little talk with Field, the carpenter. From him he learned that John Smith had downed tools for a fortnight past, that he had been roaming the countryside at all hours of the day and night, and that "he wor shapin' for another of his attacks." Field was a sensible man, whom the vicar respected in spite of the fact that he was not among the most regular of the flock; therefore at some length he discussed with him a very vexed question. In reply to a direct canvass of his judgment, Field admitted that "John might be a bit soft-like." At the same time he confessed the highest affection and admiration for him, and somewhat to the vicar's annoyance volunteered the opinion that "he went about doing good."

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"How can you think that, Field?" said Mr. Perry-Hennington, sternly.

"Well, sir, they say he keeps the chaps out of the publics."

"Who says so?"

"At Brombridge, sir. They are getting to think a lot of him there."

"Are they indeed?"

"He preaches there you know, sir, on Sunday afternoons at the market cross."

The vicar was shocked and scandalized. "I hope," he said, "that he doesn't give vent to the sort of opinions he does here."

"Yes, sir," said Field, with respectful perplexity. "I know you parsons think him a bit of a freethinker, but I'm sure he means well. And begging your pardon, sir, he knows a lot about the Bible too."

"I take leave to doubt that, Field," said the vicar, who had suddenly grown so deeply annoyed that he felt unable to continue the conversation. He left the shop abruptly. A little more light had been thrown on the subject, but somehow it increased his sense of worry and discomfort. He had not thought well to enlighten Field as to the gravamen of the charge, yet it was hard to repress a feeling of irritation that so

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sensible a man should hold such a heterodox view of his employee.

True to his appointment, Dr. Parker arrived at one o'clock. Before he came Mr. Perry-Hennington told Edith in a casual way the reason of his coming to Penfold. To her father's consternation, something in the nature of a scene had followed.

"Then you intend to have him removed to an asylum!" she exclaimed in a tone of horror.

"Undoubtedly. The public interest demands nothing less."

The girl was greatly upset. And nothing her father could say had any effect upon her distress. She felt herself responsible for this tragic pass. Her unhappy intervention in the first place had brought the thing about, and now she rued it bitterly. She implored her father to let the matter drop. But her prayer was vain. At all times a singularly obstinate man, upon a question of conscience and duty he was not likely to be moved by mere words.

Out of respect for his daughter's feelings, and also out of regard for the ears of Prince, the parlor maid, Mr. Perry-Hennington did not refer to the matter in the course of the meal. But as soon as it was over he discussed it at length with his visitor. And he presented his view of the matter with such a cogent

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energy that, for such a mind as Dr. Parker's, whose main concern was "things as they are," the case of John Smith was greatly prejudiced. He did not say as much to the vicar, indeed he did his best to keep an open and impartial mind on the subject, but he would have been more or less than himself had he not felt that only the strongest possible justification could have moved such a man as Mr. Perry-Hennington to his present course of action.

In the privacy of the study the vicar explained the situation to Dr. Parker at considerable length, giving chapter and verse for the theory he had formed. And then the two gentlemen set out to find John Smith.

Fate went with them. A slow, solemn climb from the vicarage to the village green brought a prompt reward. Straight before them a frail, bareheaded, poorly-clad figure was outlined against a rather wild June sky.

"Our man," the vicar whispered.

Dispositions of approach were made automatically. The two gentlemen stepped on to the common sedately enough. As they did so, the vicar ostentatiously pointed out the grandeur of the scene, and its wide, sweeping outlook on two counties, while the doctor lingered in examination of the heath and the plucking of a flower.

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As usual the young man was leaning against the priest's stone. Near by was a delicate flower which Dr. Parker stooped to gather.

"Tell me, what's the name of this little thing?" he said to the vicar, in a loud bluff voice.

"You're overtaking my knowledge," said the vicar, with a similar bluff heartiness. "I don't think I've ever noticed it before. But here is a man who can help us, no doubt."

With a courteous, disarming smile, the vicar suddenly brought his eyes to bear on John Smith. And then he added in a voice full of kindness and encouragement: "I am sure *you* can tell us the name of this flower."

"Yes, I should very much like to know." As the doctor gave John Smith the flower, he seized the moment for the closest possible scrutiny of the man before him. Not a detail was lost of the extraordinarily sensitive face, with its gaunt but beautiful lines, the luminous eyes, whose pupils were distended to an abnormal width, the look of fastidious cleanliness, which the poor clothes and the rough boots seemed to accentuate.

"It is a kind of wild orchis," said the young man in a gentle tone, which to the doctor's ear had a rather curious sound. "It is not common hereabouts, but

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you will find a few in Mr. Whympers's copse over at Grayfield."

"You seem well up in the subject of flowers," said Dr. Parker.

"I study them," said the young man with a quick intensity which caused the doctor to purse his lips. "I love them so." He pressed the slender, tiny petals to his lips. "What a wonderful, wonderful thing is that little flower! I weep when I look at it."

Involuntarily the doctor and the vicar looked at the young man's face. His eyes had filled with tears.

"Why do you let a harmless little flower affect you in that way?" said Dr. Parke.

"I suppose it's the joy I feel in its beauty. I love it, I love it!" And he gave back the little flower to the doctor with a kind of rapture.

"Do you feel like that about everything?"

"Oh, yes. I worship the Father in all created things." The too-sensitive face changed suddenly. A light broke over it. "I am intoxicated with the wonders around me, I am enchanted with the glories of the things I see."

"It certainly is a very wonderful world that we live in," said the vicar, who sometimes fell unconsciously into his pulpit voice.

"Think of the continents of divine energy in the

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very air we breathe." There was a hush of awe in the voice of John Smith. "Think of the miracles happening under that tiny leaf."

"They are not visible to me." Dr. Parker impressively removed his gold-rimmed eyeglasses and rubbed them slowly on a red silk handkerchief.

The young man drew aside a frond of bracken, and disclosed a colony of black ants.

"Does the sight of that move you also?" said Dr. Parker.

"They are part of the mystery. I see the Father there."

"I presume you mean God?" said the vicar.

"Male and female created He them," said the young man in a hushed tone. "I hardly dare look at the wonders around me, now the scales have fallen from my eyes and the heavens have opened."

"The heavens have opened!" said Dr. Parker.

"Oh, yes. I can read them now. I gaze upon the portals. I see the chariots. There are the strong souls of the saints riding in glory across the sky. Look! look!"

The doctor and the vicar followed the lines of the young man's hand, which pointed straight into a brilliant, but storm-shot sun. They had instantly to lower their eyes.

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"It would blind one to look at that," said Dr. Parker.

"Nothing can blind you if you have learned to see," said the young man. It astonished them to observe that his gaze was fixed upon the flaming disc of light. Suddenly he placed a finger on his lips, entreating them to listen.

The doctor and the vicar listened intently.

"Do you hear the music?"

"I am afraid I hear nothing," said Dr. Parker.

"Nor I," said the vicar.

"There are harps in the air."

"I don't hear a sound," said Dr. Parker.

"Nor I," said the vicar, straining his ears; "or if I do it is the water of the mill by Burkett's farm."

"The longer I listen, the more wonderful the music grows."

The vicar and the doctor shook their heads gravely.

"There are also times, I believe, when you hear voices?" said the vicar.

"Yes, a voice speaks to me continually."

"Would you say it belonged to any particular person," said the doctor, "or that it came from any particular source?"

"It is the voice of the Father."

"The voice of God, I presume?"

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"Yes—the voice of God."

"Does it lay a charge upon you?" the vicar asked.

"It tells me to save the world."

The complete simplicity of the statement took the vicar and the doctor aback. They looked solemnly at each other, and then at him who had made it.

"And you intend to obey it?" The doctor managed to put the question in a tone of plain matter-of-course.

The young man's face took a strange pallor. "I must, I must," he said. And as he spoke his questioners noticed that he had begun to shake violently.

"Are we to understand," said the vicar, speaking very slowly, "that you expect supernatural powers to be given you?"

"I don't know. I cannot say." A light broke over the gentle face. "But a way will be found."

"How do you know that?" said the vicar.

"It has been communicated to me."

"Is that to say," the vicar sternly demanded, "that you are about to claim plenary powers?"

Before the young man answered the question he covered his eyes with his hands. Again he stood in an attitude of curious listening intensity. The doctor thought he could hear a wind, very faint and gentle,

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stirring in the upper air, but to the vicar it was the sound of water flowing by Burkett's farm.

The vicar repeated his question.

"I am to claim nothing," said the young man at last.

"You do not claim to be a Buddha or a Messiah, or anything of that kind?" said the vicar, compressing stern lips.

Again there was silence. Again the young man closed his eyes.

"I am to claim nothing," he said.

XVI

INVOLUNTARILY, as it seemed, and without an attempt to carry the matter further, the vicar and the doctor turned abruptly on their heels and left the common.

"A case of possession," said the doctor, by the time they had reached the top of the village street. "And quite the most curious in my experience."

"At any rate," said the vicar, "now you have seen the man for yourself, you will have not the slightest difficulty in certifying him!"

"You really feel it to be wise and necessary?"

"I do." The vicar spoke with his habitual air of decision. "I feel very strongly that it will be in the public interest. In fact, I go further. I feel very strongly that it will be in the national interest to have this man certified as a lunatic."

"He seems a singularly harmless creature."

"There is always the fear that he may get worse. But apart from that, he is having a bad effect on weak, uneducated minds. He already pretends to powers he

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doesn't possess, and has taken lately to faith-healing, and mischievous nonsense of that kind."

The rubicund visage of Dr. Parker assumed a grave, professional look. "There can be no doubt," he said, "that he is on the verge of, if he is not already suffering from, mania."

"In a word," said the vicar, "you fully agree that it will be wise to have him taken care of?"

"From what you have told me," said Dr. Parker, with professional caution, "I am inclined to think that, in a time like the present, it may be the right course to adopt."

"Very well," said the vicar gravely. "Let us now go and see Joliffe, and get him to indorse your opinion as the law requires. And then tomorrow morning I will run over to Grayfield and get Whymper to move in the matter without delay."

XVII

THE vicar and Dr. Parker slowly descended the long, straggling village street, until they came to Dr. Joliffe's gate. They found their man at home. In shirt sleeves and pipe in mouth he was mowing the back lawn with a very creditable display of energy for a householder of fifty-five, on an extremely oppressive afternoon.

The perspiring Dr. Joliffe donned a light alpaca coat, and then led his visitors to the summerhouse at the bottom of the garden, where they could talk without fear of being overheard.

The vicar began at once in a concise, businesslike way.

"Dr. Parker has seen John Smith. And he is quite ready to certify him."

"Hopelessly mad, poor fellow, I'm afraid," said Dr. Parker.

A quick frown passed across the face of Dr. Joliffe.

"Dangerously?" The tone was curt.

Dr. Parker slowly weighed out a careful reply.

"Not exactly, in an active sense. But there is no

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saying when he will become so. At any time acute mania may intervene."

"It may, of course." But it was a reluctant admission. Moreover, there was an implication behind it which Dr. Parker was not slow to understand. No love was lost between these two, nor was their estimate of each other's professional abilities altogether flattering.

"Highly probable," said Dr. Parker, in a warming tone.

"Contrary to my experience of the man. I've known him some years now, and though I'm bound to own that he has always seemed a bit cracked, it has never occurred to me that it was a case to certify, and with all deference I am not quite convinced even now."

"But surely, Joliffe," the vicar interposed, with some little acerbity, "the need for the course we propose to take was made clear to you on Saturday?"

The look of doubt deepened in Dr. Joliffe's red face. "I'm very sorry"—there was obvious hesitation in the tone—"but you are really asking a general practitioner to take a great deal on himself."

"But why?" There was a perceptible stiffening of the vicar's voice. "I thought I had fully explained to you on Saturday what the alternative is. You see

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if we can't get the man into an asylum quietly and humanely, he must be made amenable to the Defense of the Realm Regulations. If you would prefer that course to be taken I will go over to the Depot and see General Clarke. We are bound in honor to move in the matter. But Dr. Parker agrees with me that an asylum will be kinder to the man himself, less disturbing to the public mind, and therefore in the national interest."

"I do, indeed," said Dr. Parker.

But the frown was deepening upon Dr. Joliffe's face.

"I see the force of your argument," he said. "But knowing the man as I do, and feeling him to be a harmless chap, although just a little cracked, no doubt, I'm not sure that you don't take an exaggerated view of what he said the other day."

"Exaggerated view!" The vicar caught up the phrase. "My friend," he said imperiously, "don't you realize the danger of having such things said in this parish at a time like the present?"

"Yes, I do." There was a stiffening of attitude at the vicar's tone. "But even in a time like the present, I shouldn't like to overstate its importance."

The vicar looked at Dr. Joliffe almost with an air

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of pity. "Don't you realize the effect it might have on some of our young villagers?"

"Well, that is the point, and I'm not sure that you don't overstate it, vicar."

"That's an Irishman all over," said Mr. Perry-Hennington to Dr. Parker in an impatient aside. "One can never get him to agree to anything."

"Even if I was born in Limerick," said Dr. Joliffe, with an arch smile, "it gives me no particular pleasure to be unreasonable. I'll own that when the best has been said for the man he's not so wise as he might be."

"And don't forget that he claims to be a Messiah."

"So I understand. But there's historical precedent even for that, if we are to believe the Bible."

The vicar drew his lips into a straight line, and Dr. Parker followed his example.

They did not venture to look at each other, but it was clear they held the opinion in common that Dr. Joliffe had been guilty of a grave breach of taste.

"The trouble with you Saxons," said Dr. Joliffe, who had been getting his back gradually to the wall, "is that you have too little imagination; the trouble with us Celts that we have too much."

"Joliffe," said the vicar, in a tone of pain and surprise, "please understand that such a thing as imagination does not enter into this matter. We are face to

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face with a very unpleasant fact. There is a mad person in this parish, who goes about uttering stupid blasphemies, who openly sides with the enemy, and we have to deal with him in a humane, but practical and efficient way. Dr. Parker and I are agreed that the public safety calls for certain measures; we are also agreed that the national interest will be best served by their adoption. Are you ready to fall in with our views?—that is the question it is my duty to ask you.”

Dr. Joliffe stroked a square jaw. He resented the vicar's tone and at that moment he disliked Dr. Parker more intensely than he had ever disliked any human being. In Dr. Joliffe's opinion both stood for a type of pharisee behind which certain reactionary forces, subtle but deadly, invariably intrenched themselves. But Dr. Joliffe, although cursed with an average share of human weakness, was at heart a fair-minded man. And his one desire, now that he was up against a delicate problem, was to hold the balance true between both parties. From the Anglo-Saxon standpoint the vicar and that old fool, Parker, were right no doubt; but from the Celtic outlook there was also something to be said of John Smith.

“Now, Joliffe,” said the vicar, “please understand this. Our man has to be put away quietly, without any fuss. He will be very comfortable in the county

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asylum. I speak from experience. I go there once a month. Everything possible is done to insure the well-being of the inmates. It may be possible to let him take his books with him. He is a great reader, I hear—even writes verses of sorts. Anyhow I will speak to Dr. Macey about him at the first opportunity, and do all I can for his comfort and happiness."

But Dr. Joliffe compressed obstinate lips, and stared with a fixed blue eye at the storm clouds coming up from that dangerous quarter, the southwest.

"By the way, as I think I told you," continued the vicar, "I spoke to Whymper on Saturday evening. He sees as I do. And he said the bench would support my action, provided the man was duly certified by two doctors to meet the requirements of the Lord Chancellor. Now come, Joliffe, be reasonable."

But Dr. Joliffe shook a somber head.

"I don't like to do it on my own responsibility," he said.

"But you have our friend Parker to share it."

"The fact is," said Dr. Joliffe slowly, "I walked as far as Hart's Ghyll this morning to have a little talk with Brandon on the subject."

"Gervase Brandon!" To the mind of the vicar much was explained. "Wasn't it rather a pity to trou-

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ble the poor fellow with a thing of this kind in his present condition?"

"I understand that you didn't hesitate to trouble him with it on Saturday."

"I did not. I felt it to be my duty."

The retort was so obvious, that Dr. Joliffe did not trouble to make it. When the vicar chose to look at things from the angle of his official status it was hardly worth while to argue with him.

"May I ask what you said to Gervase Brandon?"

"I told him what you proposed to do."

The vicar shook a dubious head. "Was that wise, do you think—in the circumstances?"

Dr. Joliffe ignored the question.

"I informed him also," he added, "that I didn't feel equal to taking such a great responsibility upon myself."

"You went so far as to tell him that?"

"I did. This affair has cost me a great deal of anxiety since I saw you on Saturday. I feel very strongly that we ought to have further advice."

"We have it." The vicar inclined a diplomatist's head in Dr. Parker's direction.

"I told the squire," said Dr. Joliffe, with a menacing eye upon Dr. Parker, "that I didn't feel able to

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move in the matter without the advice of a mental specialist."

"The man is as mad as a hatter," said Dr. Parker, with the air of a mental specialist.

"But is he certifiable—that's the point?"

"He's a source of danger to the community," the vicar cut in. But Dr. Joliffe had asked Dr. Parker the question, and his eye demanded that Dr. Parker should answer it.

"I think we may take Mr. Perry-Hennington's word for that," said Dr. Parker.

"Well, with all deference," said Dr. Joliffe, "the squire feels very strongly that the man ought not to be interfered with."

The vicar was plainly annoyed. He caught up Dr. Joliffe sharply. "I am sorry to say that Brandon with all his merits is little better than an atheist."

The tone and the manner were a little too much for Irish blood. "And so am I if it comes to that," said Dr. Joliffe; and then like a true Hibernian he added: "And I thank God for it."

The vicar and Dr. Parker were greatly pained by this indiscretion, but both were careful to refrain by word or gesture from making the slightest comment upon it.

"Well, Joliffe," said the vicar, when at last he was

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able to achieve the necessary composure, "if you cannot see your way to act with us we must find someone who will."

By now the blood of Dr. Joliffe was running dangerously high. But fresh with his talk with Brandon, which had greatly impressed him, he somehow felt that big issues were at stake. Therefore he must hold himself in hand.

"Mr. Perry-Hennington," he said, after an inward struggle, in a voice scrupulously mild, "I must tell you that Mr. Brandon has offered to pay the fee of any mental specialist we may like to summon, and that he will abide by his decision."

"Abide by his decision!" The words were unfortunate, but tact was not one of Dr. Joliffe's virtues. "Very good of Brandon I'm sure. But may one ask where *he* stands in the matter?"

"He's the friend of John Smith."

"It hardly seems a friendship to be proud of." The vicar continued to let off steam. "Still I think I see your point. The law entitles the man to have a friend to speak for him, and if Brandon constitutes himself his champion we can't complain. What do you say, Parker?"

"By all means let him be given every chance," said Dr. Parker, in a suave, judicial tone. "Personally I

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don't think there is a shadow of a doubt that the man is of unsound mind, and I am convinced, after what you have told me, that he ought to be taken care of; but as Joliffe doesn't agree, and as Mr. Brandon will pay a specialist's fee, I am quite willing to meet him in consultation."

"Very well, Parker," said the vicar, in his getting-things-done voice, "that seems reasonable. Let us have a man down at once. Suggest somebody, and we'll telegraph here and now."

Dr. Parker thought for a moment.

"Shall we say Murfin? A sound man, I believe, with a good reputation."

"Belongs to the old school," said Dr. Joliffe. "Why not Moriarty?"

Dr. Parker stiffened visibly at the interruption. "Wrote a cranky book, didn't he, called 'The Power of Faith' or something?"

"Moriarty is a pioneer in mental and psychical matters. And Mr. Brandon has a high opinion of his book. It is only the other day that he advised me to read it."

But the vicar shook his head in vigorous dissent. "The trouble is," he said, "that Brandon is getting more than a little cranky himself."

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"Depends upon what you mean by the term," said Dr. Joliffe bristling.

"You know, Joliffe, as well as I do," the vicar expostulated, "that our friend Brandon, fine and comprehensive as his intellect may be, is now in a very curious state. His judgment is no longer to be trusted."

"I'd trust his judgment before my own in some things," was Dr. Joliffe's rejoinder.

"I'd trust no man's judgment before my own in anything," said the vicar. "I'm no believer in the gloss that is put on everything nowadays. White is white, black is black, and two and two make four—that's my creed, and no amount of intellectual smear is going to alter it. However, we shall not agree about Brandon, therefore we shall not agree about Dr. Moriarty. And as it will devolve upon our friend Parker to meet the specialist and issue the certificate, it seems to me only fair and reasonable that he should make his own choice."

With a touch of professional rigor, Dr. Parker thought so too.

"Well, it's immaterial to me," said Dr. Joliffe, "as I'm retiring from the case. All the same I think it would be best for the squire to decide. He who pays the piper has a right to call the tune."

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"It doesn't apply in this case," said the vicar incisively. "One feels that one is making an immense concession in studying Brandon's feelings in the way one is doing. You seem to forget, Joliffe, that we have a public duty to perform."

"I am very far from forgetting it. But Brandon and I feel that we have also our duty to perform. And that is why I take the liberty to suggest that he should choose his own mental specialist."

"Preposterous. What do you say, Parker?"

Dr. Parker tacitly agreed.

"Well," said Dr. Joliffe, "if the squire will consent to Murfin, it's all the same to me, but if my opinion is asked, I am bound to say that to my mind Moriarty is by far the abler man."

"Why do you think so?" Dr. Parker asked.

"More modern in his ideas. Sees farther. Knows we are only at the threshold of a tremendous subject."

"Nonsense, Joliffe." The vicar was losing a little of his patience. "White's white, and black's black. This man John Smith ought not to be at large, and neither you nor Brandon nor all the mad doctors in Harley Street can be allowed to dictate to us in the matter. We have our duty to do, and very disagreeable it is, but fortunately there is the county bench behind us."

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"Quite so," said Dr. Joliffe, drily.

"At the same time we don't want to put ourselves wrong with public opinion, nor do we want to act in any way that will hurt people's feelings. And it is most undesirable that it should be made into a party or sectarian matter. Therefore, before we take definite action, I think I had better walk as far as Hart's Ghyll, and have a few further words with Gervase Brandon myself."

Both doctors promptly fell in with the suggestion. There seemed much to be said for it. Dr. Parker was invited to await Mr. Perry-Hennington's return and to join Dr. Joliffe in a cup of tea in the meantime. To this proposal Dr. Parker graciously assented; and the vicar, already inflamed with argument, went forth to Hart's Ghyll to lay his views before Gervase Brandon.

XVIII

AS Mr. Perry-Hennington impatiently clicked the doctor's gate, "Village pettifogger!" flashed along his nervous system. Only a stupid man, or a man too much in awe of Hart's Ghyll could have been guilty of Joliffe's scruples, at a moment so ill-timed.

The afternoon's oppression was growing into the certainty of a storm. There were many portents from the southwest to which the vicar, walking rapidly and gathering momentum as he went, paid no attention. He was really angry with Joliffe; a spirit naturally pontifical had been fretted by his attitude. Apart from the fact that the issue was clear to all reasonable minds, Joliffe, having to make a choice between Cæsar and Pompey, had chosen the latter. It was very annoying, and though Mr. Perry-Hennington prided himself upon his breadth of view, he could not suppress a feeling of resentment.

In the middle of Hart's Ghyll's glorious avenue a fine car met the vicar, drove him under the trees and glided by with the flight of a bird. A lean-looking

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man in a white hat sat in a corner of the car. As he went past he waved a hand to the vicar and called out "Wednesday!" It was his new acquaintance, Mr. Murdwell.

When Mr. Perry-Hennington reached the house, a rather unwelcome surprise awaited him. Edith was seated in the inner hall with niece Millicent. Driven by the pangs of conscience, she had come to implore help for John Smith. But for Millicent, this meant the horns of a dilemma. Her sympathy had been keenly aroused by her cousin's strange confession, but Gervase had been too much troubled by the matter already, and his wife was very unwilling to tax him further.

The arrival of the vicar, while Edith and Millicent were still anxiously discussing the line to take, was very embarrassing for all three. It only needed a hint to set Mr. Perry-Hennington on the track of their conversation. And when he realized, as he did almost at once, that Edith was in the very act of working against him, he felt a shock of pain.

Dissembling his feelings, however, he asked that he might see Gervase. But Millicent with a shrewd guess at his purpose, went the length of denying him. Gervase was not quite so well, and she had foolishly allowed him to tire himself with their American neigh-

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bor, the new tenant of Longwood, who had stayed more than an hour. But the vicar was not in a mood to be thwarted. The matter was important, and he would only stay five minutes.

"Well, Uncle Tom," said the wife anxiously, "if you see Gervase for five minutes, you must solemnly promise not to refer to John Smith."

Mr. Perry-Hennington could give no such undertaking. Indeed he had to admit that John Smith was the sole cause and object of his visit. Thereupon to Edith's horror, Millicent suddenly flashed out:

"I think it's perfectly shameful, Uncle Tom, that you should be acting toward that dear fellow in the way that you are doing."

The vicar was quite taken aback. He glanced at the disloyal Edith with eyes of stern accusation. But it was not his intention to be drawn into any discussion of the matter with a pair of irresponsible women. He was hurt, and rather angry, but as always there was a high sense of duty to sustain him.

"Not more than five minutes, I promise you," he said decisively. And then with the air of a law-giver and chief magistrate, he marched along a low-ceiled, stone-flagged corridor to the library.

XIX

BRANDON was alone. The spinal chair had been set in the oriel that was so dear to him, and now he was propped up, with a book in his hand and his favorite view before him.

The vicar's greeting was full of kindness, but the stricken man met it with an air of pain, perplexity and secret antagonism.

"The very man I have been hoping to see," he said in a rather faint voice. And then he added, almost with distress, "I want so much to have a talk with you about this miserable business."

"Don't let it worry you in any way, my dear fellow," said the vicar in a tone of reassurance. "Proper and ample provision can easily be made for the poor man if we behave sensibly. At least Whymper thinks so."

"Hidebound donkey! What has he to do with it?"

The abrupt querulousness of the tone was so unlike Brandon that it rather disconcerted the vicar.

"I have always found Whymper a very honest man," he said soothingly. "And he is also a magistrate."

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"Oh, yes, a local *Shallow*."

The vicar was hurt, but the high sense of duty was with him in his task. And that task was to tell Brandon in a few concise words of Dr. Parker's visit, of his opinion of John Smith, and his views concerning him.

"And I felt it my duty to come and tell you," said the vicar, in a slow, calm, patient voice, "that Parker will meet a specialist in consultation. But the question now is, who shall it be? To my mind the point does not arise, but Joliffe, who I am sorry to say is not as helpful as he might be, is making difficulties. Parker would like Murfin, but Joliffe thinks Moriarty. But Murfin or Moriarty, what does it matter? They are both first-rate men; besides the case is so clear that it doesn't present the slightest difficulty. It is really a waste of money to pay a big fee for a London opinion when a local man like Sharling of Brombridge would do quite as well."

Brandon shook his head. A look of grave trouble came into his eyes. "No," he said, "this is a case for the best man the country can provide."

"Well, you shall choose him, my dear fellow." Mr. Perry-Hennington's air was all largeness and magnanimity. "Murfin or Moriarty, or why not such a man as Birdwood Thompson? He is in quite the front

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rank, I believe. But before you incur an expense that I'm convinced is unnecessary, I should like you to realize my own position in the matter. To my mind, it will be far kinder to have the man certified and quietly removed, rather than ask the law to take a course which may stir up local feeling in certain directions, and breed undesirable publicity in certain newspapers. Still that is neither here nor there. One is prepared to face all consequences, be what they may."

"Mr. Perry-Hennington," said Brandon in a hollow tone, "I can't help thinking that you are making a tragic mistake."

"The matter hardly admits of discussion I'm afraid. My duty lies before me. Cost what it may it will have to be done."

"But what possible harm is the man doing?"

The vicar deprecated the question by spreading out his large, strong hands. "We can't go into that," he said in a kind tone. "We don't see eye to eye. Believe me, a matter of this sort doesn't admit of discussion. Besides it will only excite you. A man has to act in these things as his conscience directs."

"Yes, of course. But with all submission, one should try to keep a sense of proportion, shouldn't one?"

"I fully agree."

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"Then why immure a constructive thinker?"

In spite of the watch he was keeping on himself the vicar caught up the phrase almost with passion.

But Brandon held his ground. "In common fairness," he said, "I feel you ought to read his noble work before you take any action."

"Words, words, words."

"Here are words also." Brandon indicated the open book beside him.

"The Bible!" The vicar could not conceal his surprise. It was almost the last thing he expected to see in the hands of so distinguished a skeptic.

Brandon was secretly amused by the air of sudden perplexity. "You see I am making my soul," he said.

The vicar was puzzled. It was hard to forbear from being gratified. But fearing the ironical spirit of the modern questioner, he kept on his guard. Brandon, he knew, had a secret armory of powerful weapons. A primitive distrust of the intellect knew better than to engage him at close quarters.

"Our friend, John Smith, has led me back to the Bible," said Brandon, with a simplicity which Mr. Perry-Hennington greatly mistrusted.

"John Smith!" The tone was frankly incredulous.

"Until the other day I had not opened it for twenty

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years. But that wonderful work of his has suddenly changed the angle of vision. And in order to read the future by the light of the past, which is the advice he gives to the world, I return to the fount of wisdom."

The vicar was more and more puzzled. To be led to the Bible by John Smith was like being inducted by the devil into the use of holy water. If Brandon was sincere he could only fear for the state of his mind. On the other hand an intellectual bravo of the ultramodern school might be luring one of simple faith into a dialectical trap. Therefore the vicar hastened to diverge from a perilous subject.

The divergence, however, was only partial. All the vicar's thought and interest played upon this vital question of John Smith, and he was there to carry it to a crucial phase. At this moment, he must see that he was not sidetracked by one whom he could only regard, at the best, as a dangerous heretic.

"Whom do you choose, my dear fellow?" said Mr. Perry-Hennington, after a wary pause. "Murfin? Moriarty? Birdwood Thompson?"

"I decline to make a choice," Brandon spoke bitterly. "It would be an insult and a mockery."

"But don't you see that it offers a protection, a safeguard for the man himself?"

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"In the eyes of the law, no doubt. But, in my view, John Smith stands above the law."

"No human being stands above the law."

"That is where I dissent."

Brandon's tone simply meant a deadlock. The vicar needed all his patience to combat it. One thing was clear: a change for the worse had set in. It would be an act of simple Christian kindness not to argue with the poor dear fellow.

"Very well," the vicar's tone was soothing and gentle, "Joliffe shall choose. He is acting for you in the matter."

"I beg your pardon. No one is acting for me in this affair. I won't incur the humiliation of any vicarious responsibility."

"But one understood from Joliffe that you would abide by the decision of a London specialist."

"That is not my recollection of the exact position I took up. In any case, I withdraw from it now. Second thoughts convince me that you mean to destroy a very exquisite thing. I am further convinced that as the world is constituted at present you can work your will, if not in one way, in another. History shows that. But it also shows that you will only be successful up to a point. Immure the body of John

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Smith if you must. Kill his soul if you can. In the meantime go your ways and leave me to abide the issue."

The vicar was distressed by this sudden flaming. He apologized with Christian humility for having worried one in a delicate state of health with a matter which, after all, did not concern him. Soothing the dear, excitable fellow as well as he could, he prepared to withdraw from the room. But Brandon was not in a mood to let this be the end of the matter.

"Before you go," he said, "I would like to speak of something else. It has a bearing on the subject we have been discussing."

Although conscience-bitten by the sudden recollection of his promise to Millicent, the vicar allowed himself to be further detained.

"I have just had a visit from the new tenant of Longwood."

"Yes, I met him in the avenue as I came here. He has very simply invited me to dine with him on Wednesday."

"Be sure you do. A very remarkable man. We had a most interesting talk."

"A great scientist, I hear."

"One of the forces of the material world. A modern Newton, the discoverer of Murdwell's Law."

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"Tell me, what is Murdwell's Law exactly?"

"At present it can only be rendered in terms of the highest mathematics, which I'm afraid is beyond a layman's power. But Murdwell himself has just told me that he expects soon to be able to reduce it to a physical formula."

"And if he does?"

"It will be the worst day this planet has known. For one thing it will revolutionize warfare completely. Radioactivity will take the place of high explosives. It may become possible to wipe out a city like London in less than a minute. It may become possible to banish forever organic life from a whole continent."

"But surely that will be to abrogate the functions of the Creator."

"Quite so. And science tells us that Man is his own Creator, and that he has been millions of years in business. And now this simple, gentle, peace-loving American of the Middle West comes along with the information that, Man having reached the phase in which he bends the whole force of his genius to destroy his own work, successes of that kind are open to him beyond the dreams of his wildest nightmares. As the learned professor said to me just now: 'Any

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fool can destroy. We are near the point where it will be possible for the infant puling in the arms of its nurse to press a button and punch a hole through the planet!" "

"No doubt he exaggerates."

"He may. On the other hand he may not. He is a great and daring thinker, and he declares there are hidden forces in the universe that man is about to harness in the way he has already harnessed electricity, which, by the way, less than a hundred years ago was a madman's dream."

"I hear he is subsidized by the government."

"He takes no payment for his services. He believes our cause to be that of civilization. Two of his boys are with the French Army, as he says, 'doing their bit to keep a lien on the future.'"

"His country can be proud of him."

Brandon could not repress a smile. The assumption of the tone was so typical of the man who used it that he was tempted to look at him in his relation to those events which were tearing the world in pieces. Had any man a right to sit in judgment on the actions of others in that calm, confident way? There was something far down in Brandon which asked the question, something deeper still which answered it. The self-complacency of this sublime noodle was not a thing to

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smile at after all; he had a sudden craving for a tomahawk.

"It seems to me," said Brandon after a pause, "that modern materialism has at last managed to produce the kind of man it has been looking for. This charming church-going American says he hopes presently to be able to establish war on a scientific basis. So far, he says, man has only been toying with the subject."

"If he can bring the end of this war a stage nearer, all honor to him," said the vicar in a measured tone.

"He certainly hopes to do that. He says that his committee of Allied scientists, which sits every day in Whitehall, is already applying Murdwell's Law to good purpose. It has every hope of finding a formula, sooner or later, which will put the Central Empires permanently out of business."

"Really!" said the vicar.

"He says that so awful are the potentialities of self-destruction inherent in Murdwell's Law that future wars may involve the planet, Earth, in cosmic suicide."

"Really!" said the vicar.

"He says that science sees already that warfare cannot remain in its present phase. Moreover, at the present moment it is an interesting speculation as to which side can first carry it a step further. Enemy

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scientists are already groping in the direction of the new light. They will soon have their own private version of Murdwell's Law; they know already the forces latent in it. If we are the first to find the formula we may be able to say a long farewell to the Wilhelmstrasse, and even to deep, strong, patient Germany herself. And if they find it first it may be a case of 'Good-by, Leicester Square,' because the first intimation the world may have is that there is a small island missing in Europe."

"Really!" said the vicar.

"It sounds fantastic. But there is not the slightest doubt that Murdwell's Law opens up a mental vista which simply beggars imagination. And there is no doubt, in the opinion of its discoverer, that by its means Man will get into touch with unknown elements capable of sealing the doom of the group of things to which he belongs."

"We'll hope not," said the vicar. "At any rate, if that is so, it seems to me that Murdwell's Law impinges upon the order of divine providence."

"There we enter upon the greatest of all questions. Just now all creeds are asking: What is Man's relation to God and the universe? Theology has one interpretation, science another. Which is right? Philosophy says that each has a glimpse of the truth, yet

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it is now inclined to believe that we have touched a new stratum which literally turns all previous theories inside out. Of course, it is not so new as it seems. Plato reached similar conclusions by a different road, but the world of empirical science has hitherto been content to regard them as brilliant but fantastic speculations. Gazelee Payne Murdwell claims to have brought them within the region of hard fact; he says science and philosophy are already half converted to his view. We enter a new era of the world's history in consequence, and very amazing manifestations are promised us."

"Whatever they may be," said the vicar stoutly, "I will not allow myself to believe that Man can abrogate the functions of the Deity."

"But what are the functions of the Deity? Would you say it was the exercise of those functions which saved Paris from being blown to pieces by the Hun?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"And yet permitted him to sink the *Lusitania*?"

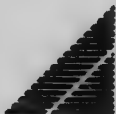
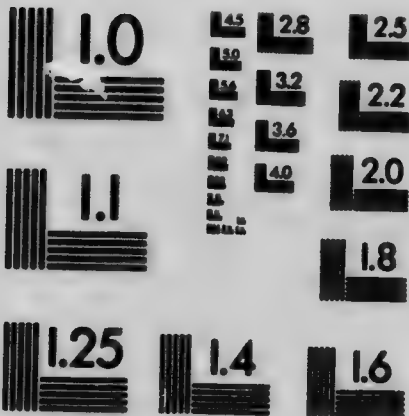
"Undoubtedly. Don't let us presume to question that God had a reason for his attitude in both cases."

"Well, in my view I am bound to say that T. N. T. and the U-boat abrogate the functions of the Deity in their humble way, just as surely as Murdwell's Law



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may expect to do in a higher one. However, discussion is useless. We shall never agree. But if on Wednesday you can persuade Professor Murdwell to talk, you may hear strange things."

"No doubt he exaggerates," said the vicar robustly. "It's the way of these inventive geniuses. On the other hand, should it seem good to the Divine Providence to destroy all the inhabitants of this wicked planet, let the will of God prevail. But in any case, my dear fellow, I hope you will not allow the ideas of the American to excite you."

"They are far from doing that, but it was very civil of a man like Murdwell to take the trouble to come and see a man who couldn't go and see him. He is one of the forces of the modern world, and in the near future he will be the problem for the human race."

"It may be so," said the vicar. "I know nothing of science. But to return to this problem of John Smith. Shall we say Birdwood Thompson? Parker is waiting to know?"

"As you please," said Brandon in a voice of sudden exhaustion.

"Very well. I'll telegraph. We must be scrupulously fair in the matter. And now let us dismiss an

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unprofitable subject. I'm afraid you have been talking too much."

"A little too much, I'm afraid," said Brandon rather feebly.

"Well, good-by, my dear fellow," said the vicar heartily. "And forget all about this tiresome business. It doesn't in any way concern you if only you could think so. Whatever happens, the man will be treated with every consideration. As for Professor Murdwell, I'm afraid he draws the long bow. These brilliant men of science always do. Good-by. And as I go out I'll ask the nurse to come to you."

XX

IN the meantime in Dr. Joliffe's summerhouse the pipe of peace was being smoked. Dr. Joliffe's cigars had a virtue of their own, and Dr. Parker, who was no mean judge of such things, had rather weakly allowed the flesh to conquer. Joliffe was a perverse fellow, but even he, apparently, was not quite impossible. His cigars somehow just saved him.

The third whiff of an excellent Corona suddenly transformed Dr. Parker into a man of the world.

"The fact is," said he, "our friend here, like all country parsons who have been too long in one place, is a bit too dogmatic."

An answering twinkle came into the eye of Dr. Joliffe. Somehow the admission seemed to clear the air considerably.

"He wants humoring."

"No doubt. But this poor chap is as harmless as I am."

"A good deal more harmless than you are Joliffe. But you know the sort of man we have to deal with. And after all old Henny-Penny's quite right—in war

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time. You see this chap is not pulling his weight in the boat. He's a bad example. Our parson is rather down on him no doubt; still, in the circumstances, he's quite right to bring him under control."

"You think so?"

"It can do no harm at any rate."

"But, you see, it's going to upset the squire. And he's such a good chap that it seems a pity."

"Well, it's no use trying to please everyone."

"Quite so."

"Why not certify the fellow and have done with it?"

"I can't, after what I said to Brandon."

"Tell me, Joliffe, why does Brandon take such an interest in him?"

"Nay," said Joliffe, "that's more than I can fathom."

"Do you think his mind has been affected by Galipoli?"

"They seem to think so."

"Do you?"

"I seem to notice a change coming over him. But it's so very gradual that one can hardly say what it may be."

"At any rate it is not a good sign for a man like

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Brandon to be wrapped up in such a fellow as John Smith."

"There I entirely agree," said Joliffe. "And to my mind that is the worst feature of the whole affair."

The two doctors exchanged their views at considerable length. And when the vicar returned from Hart's Ghyll, after an absence of more than an hour, he found the moral temperature much more equable. In fact the lion and the lamb were lying down together. Moreover, he had only to make known his own proposal that Murfin and Moriarty should be superseded in favor of Birdwood Thompson for this course to be acceptable to both. Dr. Joliffe at once led his visitors to his study, in order that a letter might be drawn up for the purpose of summoning the eminent specialist.

It took some little time for this task to be performed. There were niceties of professional phrasing to consider; also the nature of the case called for a certain amount of discreet description. At last the letter was written, and then Dr. Parker was reminded by the sight of his car, which had come round from the vicarage, that he was urgently due elsewhere.

XXI

PRESSED for time, Dr. Parker fled. But he took the letter with him in order that he might post it in Brombridge, and so insure its earlier delivery in London. As soon as Dr. Parker had gone the vicar made a survey of the elements, and then set off at his best pace on a ten-minute walk to his house.

In doing this he knew that he ran the risk of a soaking. Storm clouds which had hovered all the afternoon were now massed overhead. Hardly had he entered the village street, when he perceived large drops of rain. But in his present frame of mind he did not feel like staying a moment longer under Joliffe's roof than he could help. He was still seething within. He was still marveling at the crassness of certain of his fellow creatures. The open defection of one whom he had counted a sure ally was very hard to forgive.

However, by the time he had reached the edge of the common he realized that he was in a fair way of being drenched to the skin; moreover the rainstorms

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of the district, though often of great severity, did not last long as a rule.

Near by was a thicket of well-grown trees, which at once lured the vicar to accept their protection. As he crept under the branches there came a play of lightning, followed by thunder in a series of deafening crashes. Devoutly thankful that he had had the wit to gain shelter he crouched low, turned up his coat collar and looked out at the rain descending in a sheet. A hundred yards or so away, an old, white-aproned village woman, very thinly clad, was struggling toward her cottage. As she came near the priest's stone in the middle of the village green, a man without a hat, and no better protected from the storm than herself, suddenly sprang up before her. In an instant he had taken off his coat and placed it round her shoulders.

The old woman went slowly on toward her cottage, while the man stood coatless in the rain. It did not seem to cause him any concern, he seemed, in fact, almost to welcome the storm, as he stood erect in its midst, the elements beating upon him, the thunder rolling over his head. And the vicar, peering from his shelter, thought that once or twice his right hand was raised as if he were in the act of speaking to heaven.

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The man was John Smith. The vicar was amazed; such sheer insensibility to what was going on around was uncanny. Bareheaded, coatless, drenched to the skin, the man scorned the shelter so close at hand. The first thought that passed through the vicar's mind was one of pity for the man's physical and mental state. But hard upon that emotion came regret that the stubborn Joliffe was not also a spectator of the scene. Any doubts he still held as to the man's sanity must surely have been dispelled.

A great wind began to roam the upper air. The lightning grew more vivid, the thunder louder, the weight of rain still heavier. The vicar crouched against the bole of the best tree. And as he did so, his thoughts somehow passed from the poor, demented figure of fantasy still before his eyes, to those overwhelming forces of nature in which they were both at that minute engulfed.

Intellectually the vicar was a very modest man. Sometimes, it is true, he had been tempted to ask himself poignant questions. But he had never presumed to give an independent answer of his own. For him the solution of the central mystery of man's relation to the forces around him was comprised in the word "Faith."

But now that he was the witness of poor John

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Smith's dementia, the sense of human futility recurred to him. It needed a power of Faith to relate that drenched scarecrow, a mere insect upon whom Nature was wreaking a boundless will, to the cosmic march and profluence. For a moment the vicar was almost tempted to deny the still, small voice within and submit entirely to the judgment of the senses. His eyes, his ears, his sense of touch assured him that the poor madman out in the rain was lost in the sum of things. What relation could he have to those majestic powers by whom he was buffeted? Surely that lone, hapless figure was the symbol of Man himself.

And yet the act of devotion the man had just performed must have a meaning. It was a mystery within a mystery. Of whom had this poor blasphemer learned that trick; by what divine license did he practice it? For nearly half an hour it continued to rain pitilessly, and during that time the vicar searched and questioned his heart in regard to the man before him. At last the storm subsided; he came out of his shelter and went thoughtfully home. But in bed that night, when he closed his eyes and tried to sleep, he found the image of John Smith printed inside his eyelids.

XXII

THE next morning, when John Smith called as usual at Hart's Ghyll with his bunch of flowers, he was allowed once more to see his friend. The stricken man received him in the library with the most affectionate intimacy.

"My dear, dear fellow," he said, "how good it is to see you. You bring the light of the sun to this room whenever you enter it."

The visitor took Brandon's hand with the caressing touch of a woman. "Dear friend," he said, "I always pray that the light may accompany me wherever I go."

The simplicity of the man, which it would have been easy to misread, had now, as always, a strange effect upon Brandon. And yet he was heart-sore and miserable. The weight of sorrow now upon him seemed to transcend all his other sufferings. A cruel sense of the futility of his terrible sacrifice had overtaken him. What proof was there that it had not been in vain? After all, what hope could there be for the future of men; what was there to expect from a pur-

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blind, material world? He was now in the throes of a cruel reaction. Somehow his talk with the vicar had struck at his faith in his own kind.

He took no comfort from the thought that Mr. Perry-Hennington was a profoundly stupid man. Turning his mind back, he saw the parson of Penfold as the spiritual guide of the race of average men, of a race which allowed itself to be governed by the daily newspaper, which in one feverish hour threw away the liberties it had cost its father hundreds of years to win. Prussia was being met with Prussia, Baal with the image of Baal.

Throughout a wakeful night, that had been the thought in Brandon's heart. Behind all the swelling heroics and the turgid phrases of organized opinion, was this Frankenstein monster. The world was moving in a vicious circle. The public press had somehow managed to recreate what it had set out to destroy. The question for Brandon now was, had he been the victim of a chimera? In the course of a long night of bitterness, the thought had taken root in him that all the blood and tears humanity was shedding would merely fix the shackles more cruelly on generations yet unborn.

This morning Brandon saw no hope for the ill-starred race of men. Hour by hour his fever-tinged

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thoughts had flown to one for whom he had conceived an emotion of the highest and purest friendship, to one whom his fellows were seeking a means to destroy.

"I have been wondering," said Brandon, "whether you will consent to have your poem published? I know you are shy of print, but this is a rare jewel, the heritage of the whole world."

"Don't let us talk of it just now." There was a shadow upon the eloquent face. "I have need of guidance. My poem, such as it is, is but one aspect of a great matter. I pray that I may find a more universal one."

Brandon dissembled his surprise, but he could not bridle his curiosity. "Your poem is a great matter," he said. "To me it is wonderful. You call it 'The Door.' Why not let all the world pass through?"

"Such is my task, but I do not know that it can be fulfilled by the printed word. There may be a surer way. The question I have to ask myself is, can I do the Father's will more worthily? By prayer and fasting perhaps I may."

"But the thing is so perfect. Why gild the lily?"

"It is only one of many keys, dear friend. It is not the Door itself. It is no more than a stage in a

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long, long pilgrimage; no more than a means to the mighty end that has been laid upon me."

Brandon, however, had set his heart upon the poem's publication. To him it was a perfect thing. Moreover, he saw in it a vindication of its author, a noble answer to those who were conspiring to destroy him.

Strangely, however, John was not to be moved from his resolve. And more strangely still, as it seemed to Brandon, intimations had come to him already of the terrible fate that was about to overtake him. "It has been communicated to me that I am about to be called to a great trial," were the words he used.

Brandon, sick at heart, had hardly the courage to seek an explanation. "You—you have been told that?" He scanned anxiously the face of the man at his side.

"Yes," was the answer. "The inner voice spoke to me last evening. I don't know when the blow will fall, or what fate awaits me, but a sword hangs by a single hair above my head."

"And—and you are not afraid?" To Brandon this calmness was almost superhuman.

"I am not afraid. The souls of the just are in the hands of God. And I ask you, my dear friend, to share my faith. You are one of two witnesses to

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whom I have been allowed to reveal myself. The other is an old woman who can no longer work with her hands. You have long given her a roof for her head, and I have kept a loaf in her cupboard and found her fire in the winter. But there is only the poorhouse for her when I am taken, and I think she fears it."

"Whatever happens, that shall not be her fate."

"I will not thank so good a man. But it is your due that you should know this."

"It is my great privilege. Is there any other way in which I may hope to be of use?"

"At the moment, none." John Smith laid his hand on the arm of the stricken man with a gesture of mingled pity and solicitude. "But a time is surely coming when a heavy tax will be laid upon your friendship."

"I cannot tell you how I shall welcome it." As Brandon spoke he gazed upward to the eyes of the man who bent over him. As he met those large-pupiled orbs, a curious thrill passed through his frame. In the sudden sweep of his emotion was an odd sense of awe.

"I foresee, dear friend, that you are about to be called to a hero's task." The soft, low voice seemed to strike through Brandon as he lay.

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"Whatever it may be, I accept it joyfully. In the meantime I can only pray that I may stand worthy in the day of trial."

"Of that there can be no doubt—if you will always remember that one unconverted believer may save the whole world."

For many days to come these cryptic words were to puzzle Brandon, and to linger in his ears. But in the moment of their utterance he could seek no elucidation. His whole soul was melted by a sense of awe. It was as if a new, unknown power was beginning to unfold him.

John Smith kissed Brandon gravely on the forehead and then went away. The stricken man was left in a state of bewildered perplexity. And a heavier load of misery was now upon him than any he had known. A rare, exquisite thing had been revealed to him in a miraculous way. It was about to suffer a cruel fate, and he had not the power to save it.

XXIII

BRANDON was still brooding over a tragedy he could not avert when a nurse came into the room. She was a practical, vigorous creature, plain and clean of mind, and after a single shrewd glance at the patient she proceeded to take his temperature with a clinical thermometer.

"Just as I thought." An ominous head was shaken. "That man always has a bad effect upon you. I shall have to forbid him seeing you in the future."

"What nonsense!" said Brandon.

"This speaks for itself." The nurse held up the thermometer. "He always puts you up to a hundred. You are nearly a hundred and one now, and you'll have to go to bed and stay there until you are down a bit."

It was vain for Brandon to desist. He was at the mercy of Olympians who did not hesitate to misuse their powers. He was whisked off to bed like a naughty child, and the privilege of a further talk with John Smith was withdrawn indefinitely. He protested strongly to the nurse and bitterly to his wife, but he was told that it would not be safe to see the young

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man again until he could do so without playing tricks with his temperature.

Brandon fumed in durance for the rest of the day. The patience which had borne him through all his trials threatened to desert him now. He was tormented with the thought of his own helplessness. The recent visit had moved Brandon to the very depths of his being, and the longing to help John Smith escape the coil that fate was weaving now burnt in his veins a living fire. As he lay helpless and overwrought, on the verge of fever, the stupidities of the little world around him were magnified into a crime for which humanity itself would have to pay.

The next morning, Wednesday, at eleven o'clock came Dr. Joliffe. The higher medical science had begun to despair of ever restoring to Brandon the use of his limbs, and he was now in the sole care of his local attendant, who came to see him every other day.

Dr. Joliffe found the patient still keeping his bed by the orders of the nurse. In the course of an uncomfortable night he had slept little, and his temperature was still a matter for concern. Moreover, not the nurse alone, but Mrs. Brandon also, had already delivered themselves vehemently on the subject of John Smith.

For one reason or another Dr. Joliffe would have

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been very willing just now to consign John Smith to limbo. Nor was this desire made less when the patient, after being duly examined, reported upon, and admonished, requested the nurse to withdraw from the room in order that he might talk with the doctor privately.

Joliffe knew well enough what was coming. And he would have done much to avoid further contact with a most unhappy subject, from which consequences were flowing of an ever-increasing embarrassment. But there was no means of escape. For Brandon, the subject of John Smith had become almost an obsession; a fact which the doctor had begun to realize to his cost.

"What steps have been taken?" Brandon began as soon as they were free of the nurse's presence.

"Steps?" Joliffe fenced a little.

"In regard to John Smith." There was a sudden excitement in the bright eyes. "He's in my mind night and day. I can't bear the thought that he should be destroyed."

"I'm sorry to say that Birdwood Thompson can't come here." The professional voice was dulcet and disarming. "He's in a very bad state of health and giving up practice. His second boy went down on the *Victorious*, and his eldest was killed the other day in

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France, so I suppose that may have something to do with it."

"Well, what is being done?"

"As you ask the question," was the cautious reply, "we have agreed upon Murfin. Personally, I don't think he's as good as Moriarty or the other man, but we wrote to him in order to save trouble."

"In order to save trouble!" Brandon gasped. "Save trouble in a matter of this kind?"

"Certainly. And we are all of us very anxious that you should not worry over it any more."

"But—don't you see—what a terrible thing it is?"

"Not exactly terrible." Dr. Joliffe spoke gravely but cheerfully. "Quite an everyday occurrence, you know, if one looks at it in the right way."

"An everyday occurrence—if—one—looks—at—it—in—the right way!"

"Undoubtedly. Cases of this kind are always arising. Whatever view one may take of the man, he is certainly on the border line; therefore, whether he's certified or not is merely a question of expediency. And what I have to point out to you is that in the last resort, as the world is just now, with all these public safeguards in operation the final decision will be taken by the authorities."

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"How cruel!" said Brandon, with growing excitement.

"Not necessarily cruel," said Dr. Joliffe in a mellifluous tone.

"To think of our local *Shallows* sitting in judgment on the first spirit of the age!"

"The irony of circumstances."

"No." Brandon's eyes were hectic. "It takes more than two thousand years to change the world. An old story is being retold with a few modern improvements. I see that. But, Joliffe, I believe you to be a just man, and I count on your help. For the love we both bear the Republic, I want you to put up a fight for John Smith."

"There, my dear fellow, calm yourself," said the doctor soothingly. "I will undertake to see that no injustice is done in the matter."

"In other words, that he is not molested."

"That is beyond my power, because, as I say, the Bench will move if we don't."

"Then leave it to them to take the first step. And in the meantime we'll get legal advice."

"Murfin comes down on Friday."

"Easy to stop him."

"The vicar won't consent to that, I'm afraid."

"No, I suppose not. But if you love this country

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you will do your best to restrain a profoundly stupid man."

Plain, common-sensible Dr. Joliffe thought the line of argument a little high-flown, and said so in a tone of scrupulous kindness.

"I don't overstate," said Brandon. "Let me explain my meaning. The Republic is rising to a height of moral grandeur that few would have dared to prophesy for her. But as always, there is a flaw in her armor. The enemies of the light are seeking it, and if they should find it there is absolutely nothing between this world and barbarism."

"I'm afraid I don't follow." Dr. Joliffe shook a grave head.

"I can tell you that she is about to treat her most august citizen as Rome, her great prototype, treated Another."

Dr. Joliffe continued to shake his head. Not only was he puzzled, he was rather distressed by such an extravagant statement. "How I wish I could get your mind off this subject!" he said.

"You must not hope to do that," said Brandon. "It is decreed that I should lie supine, a helpless log, while night and day my brain is turned into a weaver's shuttle. I can do nothing, yet I somehow feel that the high gods have called me to do everything. This man

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has no other friend, and it is for that reason, Joliffe, that I ask you to stand my proxy in his defense."

"But I assure you no defense is possible," said Joliffe, with a feeling of growing distress.

"Let us brief counsel."

"No purpose will be served. As you know, the vicar is a most stubborn man. And if he doesn't succeed one way he will another. If we doctors are obdurate he will turn to the Bench, and if the Bench won't oblige he'll have recourse to the military."

"It hardly seems credible."

"I agree. But that's the man. And the worst of it is that from his own point of view in a time like the present he may be perfectly right."

"I refuse to believe that he can be right at any time."

"But surely, a man who sides openly with the enemy ought not to be at large."

"Has he gone beyond what Jesus would have done in such circumstances?"

"Hardly a practical analogy, I'm afraid. In any case, John Smith is not Jesus, even if his half-witted old mother may think so. The law is bound to regard him as a crack-brained rustic, and in my humble opinion anyone who tries to persuade it that the poor fellow is anything else, will be very unwise."

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"In other words you decline your help?"

"Only because," said Dr. Joliffe, "I now see the hopelessness of the position. Knowing John Smith as I do, I consider that Mr. Perry-Hennington has made a mountain out of a molehill. Of course he's a fanatic on the subject, but the poor, feckless chap is amenable to the law as it exists at present, and he has no means of escape. It will be far wiser, believe me, to accept the inevitable. All that his friends can hope to do is to make things as comfortable for him as possible."

"That shall be done at any rate," said Brandon. "It is Perry-Hennington's intention, I presume, to have him sent to the county asylum."

"It is the only place for him, I'm afraid. But, of course, even there he will be extremely well treated."

"I don't question that, but assuming it to be his destination, I should like him to live in comfort and dignity. Wouldn't it be possible for him to go to some such place as Wellwood Sanatorium?"

"Well, of course," said Dr. Joliffe, "that is almost a question of ways and means. Wellwood is an ideal place for the poor fellow. But of course it is out of the question."

"Why?"

"The expense."

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"No matter what it may be," said Brandon, "I shall be only too happy to bear it."

"It will not be less than five hundred a year."

"If it were twice as much I should count it a high privilege to be allowed to do that for him."

Dr. Joliffe shook the head of a prudent man over this piece of quixotism. "Very generous of you," he said, "but they look after their patients so extraordinarily well at Broad Hill, that I am sure this expense is quite unnecessary."

Brandon, however, stuck to his plan.

He had now made up his mind that if the worst happened, Wellwood should be the home of John Smith.

"Very well." Dr. Joliffe saw that a purposeless opposition could do no good. "If the necessity arises it shall be arranged for him to go there. And now I want you to forget all about this miserable matter. Dismiss it entirely from your thoughts."

"Impossible," said Brandon. "We are deliberately closing the Door."

"Closing the door?"

"For the human race."

The doctor looked sadly, uncomprehendingly at his patient. "I don't understand," he said.

"Of course you don't, my dear friend. It is not to

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be expected that you should. And at present I can't enlighten you."

Dr. Joliffe shook a rather ominous head. Brandon was a mass of morbid fancies and illusions; and the doctor was very far indeed from being satisfied with the state in which he found him. He felt it to be his duty to give a little serious admonition, and then he withdrew from the room. The nurse was waiting in the dressing room adjoining, and to her he confided certain misgivings. The patient must stay in bed, he must not read, he must avoid all things likely to cause worry or excitement. And beyond everything else his mind must be kept from the subject of John Smith.

XXIV

IN the evening of the same day the vicar dined at Longwood. Edith accompanied him. Mr. Murdwell had the forethought to send a car for his guests, so that a mile journey on a wet night was made *en prince*.

Mr. Perry-Hennington was not in a mood for dining out. A certain matter was still in abeyance, and it seemed to hang over him like a cloud. He felt it was weak and illogical to allow such an affair, which was one of simple duty, to disturb him. But somehow he was far more upset by it than he cared to own.

Fortunately, the evening made no great demand upon the guests. Indeed, it proved to be an agreeable relaxation. There was nothing in the nature of a party, a fact of which the vicar had been expressly apprised beforehand; five people, to wit: Mr. Murdwell, his wife and daughter, Edith and himself.

Mr. Perry-Hennington was well able to appreciate a good dinner. And in spite of his present rather disgruntled state, he did not remember ever to have

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had a better in the course of many years of dining out. The perfection of Parisian cooking allied to dry champagne was without a suspicion of war-time economy; and though the lavishness of the menu did not march with the vicar's recent pronouncements, it was hardly possible to rebuke it in the present case. Besides, these people were American; their wealth was said to be beyond the dreams of avarice; and to judge by the frame in which they were set, there seemed to be little need for them to economize in anything.

The vicar confided to Edith afterward that he had found their new neighbors "most entertaining." And this was strictly true. Intellectually he was not quite so ossified as his theological outfit made him appear. Behind the arrogance, the dogmatism, the closed mind, was a certain shrewd man-of-the-worldliness, conceived on broad and genial lines, which is seldom lacking in the English upper class. And of that class Mr. Perry-Hennington was not an unworthy specimen. He could tell a story with anyone; he knew, had known, and was connected with many persons whom the world regards as interesting; he was traveled, sociable, distinguished in manner, and the impression he made upon his host and upon his hostess more particularly—which after all was the more important matter—was decidedly favorable.

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Mr. Murdwell was a man of international reputation, though sprung from quite small beginnings in his native Ohio. And behind the sophisticated naïveté of Jooly his wife, and Bud his daughter, was a well-marked tendency to think in dukes and duchesses. They had known them on the Riviera, had studied them in hotels and country houses in divers lands, and there was little doubt that sooner or later Bud would burgeon into a princess.

The *famille* Murdwell had traveled far in a very short time. Its rise had been one of the romances of scientific and social America. The genius of Murdwell *père*, to which the whole world was now paying tribute, had, among many other things, raised a palace on Fifth Avenue, acquired property on Long Island, and a villa in Italy. To these was now added an English country house 'for the duration of the war.'

This was the first appearance of the Murdwell ladies in the United Kingdom, and they were immensely interested in it. They had only been three months in the country and everything was new. Hitherto their knowledge of it had been based on the Englishman abroad, the reports of travelers, and the national output of fiction. As a consequence, they frankly owned that they had rather underrated it. So far they had been agreeably surprised to find it not altogether a

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one-horse affair. It is true they had arrived in the island at an exceptional time, but somehow it was more a going concern than they had been led to expect.

For instance, when they were told that the local parson and his daughter were coming to dinner, they had good-humoredly resigned themselves to an evening of acute boredom. But one of the social peculiarities of England, as far as they had seen, present, was that things are always just a bit better than you look for—the evening, when it came, was really so much more entertaining than a similar function would have been in Kentucky, which they took as the equivalent for Sussex.

On sight, the meager, high-shouldered, rather frumpish, rather myopic Miss Thing, with the double-barreled name and the tortoise-shell spectacles, which she wore with effect, promised to be all that the lawless fancy of Bud and Jooly had painted her. But that was a first view. By the time dinner was over they had found things in common with her, and before the evening was out they were more inclined to sit at her feet than she was to sit at theirs. Their wonderful food and wine, their clothes and their surroundings, Bud's pearls and Jooly's diamonds, and their talk of Prince This and the Marquis So-and-So seemed to have not the slightest effect upon her. She

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took everything, Bud and Jooly included, so very much for granted, that their curiosity was piqued. Her dress was worth about a shilling a yard, her hair was done anyhow, her features did not conform to their idea of the beautiful, yet she was not in the least parochial, and both ladies agreed, that had you searched America from the east coast to the west it would have been hard to find anything quite like her.

The vicar puzzled them even more. They were not able to range him at all. Perhaps the thing which impressed them most was "that he didn't show his goods in the window."

Indeed, this fact may have struck Mr. Murdwell himself. For as soon as the meal was under way he began to discuss, with a frankness and a humor to which his guests didn't in the least object, the English custom of "not showing their goods in the window."

"And a very bad one, too," said Mr. Murdwell, raising his glass. "To my mind it's one of the reasons that's brought this war about."

The vicar asked for enlightenment.

"If your diplomacy had said: 'Now look here, Fritz, old friend, if you don't try to be a little gentleman and keep that torch away from the powder keg you'll find big trouble,' you wouldn't have had

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to send for me to put the Central Empires out of business."

"Nothing could have prevented this war," said the vicar in a deep tone. "It was inevitable."

"I am not sure that we shall agree about that," said Mr. Murdwell coolly. "If you had let them know the strength of your hand they would never have dared to raise you."

The vicar shook his head in strong dissent.

"This trouble goes back some way," said Mr. Murdwell. "It was in the sixties that you first took to giving people the impression that they could make doormats of you. And then came the Alabama arbitration business in which you curled up at our big talk. We said, 'England's a dud,' and we've been saying it ever since. And why? Because like friend Fritz and all the rest of the push, in diplomacy we take moderation for weakness."

"Would you have our diplomacy always in shining armor?" said the vicar.

"No I wouldn't. But there's the golden mean. Think of the way you let Bismarck put his thumb to his nose."

"But that's an old story."

"The historian of the future will have to tell it, though. It seems to me that the world has a pretty

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strong complaint against you. You've underplayed your hand a bit too much. If you had been the Kingpin of Europe, as you ought to have been, and kept the other scholars in their places, things might have been different."

This airy dogmatism amused the vicar. But in most other people it would have annoyed him extremely.

"Of course I can't agree," he said mildly. "I am glad to say we don't regard this war as a material issue. For us it is a conflict between right and wrong."

"Quite so," said Mr. Murdwell. "And I've already figured that out for myself and that's why I am here. If I criticize it's in the spirit of friendship. In this war you've gone big. The fact is, you are a bigger proposition than outsiders thought. And the longer I stay here the sharper it bites me. Nobody knows what your resources are. Take our neighbor at Hart's Ghyll. When I went the other day to make friends with him, it took my breath away to think of a man like that volunteering as a tommy to be frizzled in Gallipoli."

"But why shouldn't he," said the vicar, "if he felt it to be his duty?"

"As you say, why not? But it's large—for a man like that."

"Surely not more so for him than for anyone else."

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"There we shan't agree. There's a kind of man who can't keep out of a scrap wherever one happens to be going. And in these islands you've got more of that sort to the square mile than anywhere else I've visited, although I've not yet seen the Basutos. But Gervase Brandon is not of that type. War is against every instinct that man's got. He hates it with every fiber of his nature."

"There are many thousands like him," said the vicar; "many thousands who have simply given their lives—and more than their lives—in a just quarrel."

"I know. But the quarrel was not his, and he didn't make it. And it was not as if, like the Belgians, the French, and the Russians, he had the Hun on his doorstep. It would have been quite easy for a man like that to say: 'Leave it to the British Navy. Sooner or later they are bound to clear up the mess.'"

"He was too honest to do that," said the vicar. "He saw that a test case had arisen between right and wrong, between God and Antichrist, and he simply went and did his duty."

"Well, I can only say," Mr. Murdwell rejoined, "that when I saw him the other day he seemed to believe in neither."

"That's because you don't really know him. Just now, it is true, he is in rather a disturbed state

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mentally. He has always had a skeptical mind, and there have been times when I've been tempted to think that he gave it too much latitude. And just now he is suffering a bad reaction after the horrors he's been through. And of course he has had to give up the hope of ever walking again. But whatever the opinions of such a man may be, it is only right and fair to judge him by his actions."

"Yes, he's made a big sacrifice. And the tragedy of it is he feels now that he's made it in vain."

"His mental health is not what it might be just now, poor fellow. He has said things to me about Prussia winning, even if she loses and so on, which I know he cannot really believe."

"Why not?"

"Because Gervase Brandon is too true an Englishman ever to doubt the spirit of the race. He is depressed just now about a very trivial matter. He has magnified it out of all proportion, whereas had he been fit and well he would not have given it a second thought. No, Gervase Brandon is not the man to despair of the Republic. He is part and parcel of England herself, flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone."

"I see he's all that. In fact he belongs to one of your first families, with the most beautiful place on the countryside, and the *manes* of his ancestors, who

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went to the Crusades, all around him. No, I suppose he couldn't help doing as he did, if you come to figure it out."

"He was without a choice in the matter as he freely admits."

"And yet that man's a highbrow of highbrows. His knowledge amazed me—not on his own subject, of which he didn't speak, and I didn't either, because I know nothing about it, but on my own—on which I claim to know just a little more than anyone else."

"On the subject of Murdwell's Law?" said the vicar with an air of keen interest.

But dinner was now at an end, and as the inexhaustible subject of Murdwell's Law was at all times a little too much for the ladies of the house, they made good their escape before its discoverer could hoist himself upon a theme which promised to revolutionize the world of physical science.

XXV.

PLATO apart," said Mr. Murdwell, as soon as Bud, Edith and Jooly had fled, "or whatever our neighbor's secret vice may be, he's got the strongest brain I've come up against lately."

"I'm surprised to hear you say that," said the vicar. "Of course he's by way of being a scholar, a poet, an independent thinker, and all that sort of thing, but since he's been knocked out I'm afraid he can never be the man he was."

Mr. Murdwell confessed to surprise also. "I don't know what he may have been," he said, "before he went to Gallipoli; I can only say that when I made his acquaintance the other day, it seemed a great privilege to talk to him."

"Very interesting to know that," said the vicar.

"He's the only layman I've met who could grasp, on sight, the principle on which Murdwell's Law depends. And more than that. When by his request I explained to him as briefly as I could the theory of the whole thing, he laid his finger at once on the weak

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link in the chain. I could hardly believe that he hadn't a regular scientific training, and that he hadn't made researches of his own into radioactivity."

"He probably has."

"He says not. And he knew nothing of my theory, but he said at once that I had only to restate my formula to alter the nature of war altogether."

"And is that true?"

"Not a doubt of it. That's why I'm here, and incidentally that's why I have such a queer-looking butler. You noticed him, no doubt?"

The vicar had.

"I'll tell you a little secret. That man is one of New York's smartest detectives, and he never lets me out of his sight."

"Really!" said the vicar, drawing warily at a very large cigar.

"You see, at present it's a nice question whether certain people can hand Gazelee Payne Murdwell his medicine before he hands them theirs. That's what it all boils down to, you know."

"Really!" said the vicar.

"If Mr. Murdwell with the help of his committee of Allied scientists can solve the problem of restating his formula in terms of atomic energy, the near future will be full of perplexity for this planet."

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"Do I understand," said the vicar, drawing at his cigar, "that you are trying some terrible experiment?"

"You may take it that it is so. And we are already causing sleepless nights in certain quarters. The next few years may see warfare of a very different kind."

"But surely," said the vicar, "every law, human and divine, forbids further diabolism?"

"Nothing is forbidden to science. It works miracles. And it is merely at the threshold of its power."

"Yet, assuming, Mr. Murdwell," said the vicar solemnly, "that your theory is correct and that you are able to do all this, what do you suppose will be the future of the human race?"

Mr. Murdwell did not answer the question at once. When answer he did, it was in a voice of much gravity. "There we come up against something that won't bear looking at. Strictly speaking, the human race has no future. Unless another spirit comes into the world the human race is doomed."

"Undoubtedly," said the vicar.

"Science can destroy organic life quicker than nature can replace it. And what it does now is very little compared to what it may do a few years hence."

"Quite so," said the vicar.

"The vistas opened up by Murdwell's Law in the way of self-sacrifice don't bear thinking about. A

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time is coming when it may be possible to sweep a whole continent bare of life from end to end."

"And that, my friend, is a logical outcome of materialism, the negation of God."

"Not a doubt of it," said Mr. Murdwell, in his dry way. "It seems to me that some of you gentlemen in broadcloth will soon have to think about putting in a bit of overtime."

XXVI

GOING home with Edith in his host's car, the vicar was thoughtful and depressed. He had enjoyed his evening, he had been entertained, even exhilarated by it, yet in a curious, subtle way it had shown him the writing on the wall. His host was a portent. Regard as one would this lean-faced, church-going American, he was a very sinister phenomenon. The vicar had little or no imagination, but he saw that Mr. Murdwell's conclusions were inescapable.

For the next few days, however, Mr. Perry-Hennington was not able to give much attention to the doom of mankind. There were matters nearer at hand. He led a busy life in his parish, and in the larger parish of his local world. A mighty sitter on committees, a born bureaucrat, it was hardly his fault that he was less a spiritual force than a man of business. He was an extremely conscientious worker, never sparing himself in the service of others, yet that service connoted the common weal rather than the personal life.

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In the course of a week a very trying matter came to a head. While it was maturing the vicar kept his own counsel very strictly. He did not go near Hart's Ghyll, nor did he mention the subject to Edith. But one evening he dined three quarters of an hour earlier than usual, and then as the shadows were deepening upon Ashdown he took his hat and made his way to the common along the familiar path. As he came to Parson's Corner, the village name for the lane's debouch to the green, he stopped and looked furtively about. By the priest's stone, still clearly visible in the evening half-light, a slight, frail, bareheaded figure was kneeling as if in prayer. The vicar took out his watch and consulted it anxiously, and then he scanned all points of the compass with an air of painful expectancy. Careful arrangements had been made with the proper authorities and disagreeable, even repugnant as was the whole matter, he felt it to be his duty to see them carried out.

The shadows grew deeper upon Ashdown. At last there came a distant crunch of gravel, and the vicar perceived a closed motor car creeping up stealthily from the village and past the widow's cottage. As it came slowly toward him round the bend in the road he hailed it with a wave of the hand. It stopped

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within a few yards and two burly, sinister-looking men got out.

"Good evening, sir," said the foremost of these.

Involuntarily the vicar held up a finger.

"He's there," he whispered. And he pointed to the figure kneeling by the stone. He then added in a voice of deepening emotion, "I trust you will not use any kind of violence."

There was no need to do so, for it proved an extremely simple matter. Yet one witness of it was never to forget the scene that followed. Very cautiously the two men crept across the grass, while the vicar, unwilling to be seen by the victim, concealed himself in a thicket near by. From his ambush he saw the man rise to his feet at the approach of his captors, he saw his calm, fixed look, and he heard the singular words proceed from his lips, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

A feeling of indignant horror swept through Mr. Perry-Hennington. He could only interpret the speech as one more atrocious blasphemy, for he had caught the strange upward look, as if to the God in the sky, which had accompanied the words. Somehow the gesture had revolted him, yet in another in such circumstances it would have been sublime. And the almost beautiful humility of the man walking passively be-

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tween his captors through the summer twilight to his doom, with such words on his lips, such thoughts in his heart, filled the vicar with an odd conflict of sensations.

The man entered the car with the same curious air of submission. From his ambush the vicar watched it turn and go swiftly away, past the widow's cottage; and then faint of soul, but sustained by a sense of duty, he walked slowly down the road as far as Mrs. Bent's. To that simple dame, who opened the door to his knock, he said: "Kindly tell your neighbor, Mrs. Smith, that John may be late for his supper, and that if he is not home by ten o'clock he may not return tonight."

Anxiously pondering whether he had taken the wisest and gentlest means of breaking the news to an invalid woman, Mr. Perry-Hennington returned to the vicarage. He passed a wakeful and unhappy night, in which he was troubled by many things; and at luncheon next day, in the course of a scene with Edith they gained intensity.

"Did you know, father," she said in a tone of acute distress, "that John Smith was removed last evening without the slightest warning?"

The vicar admitted that he was aware of the fact.

"And do you know," said Edith, in a voice of

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growing emotion, "that the shock killed his mother?"

"Killed his mother!" Mr. Perry-Hennington heard that news for the first time. "The old lady is dead!"

"She died last night."

The vicar was much upset. He did not speak for some time, but at last he said: "Someone has blundered. I warned her neighbor, Mrs. Bent, to be particularly careful how she broke the news to her. I was at pains to choose Mrs. Bent, a sensible woman whom I thought I could trust. I felt the shock would be less if the news came from a neighbor instead of from me. But I see"—bitterness mingled now with the concern in the vicar's tone—"that it would have been far wiser had I taken the whole responsibility upon myself."

"I'm not sure that it would," said Edith. "Mrs. Bent says the poor thing knew what had happened without being told."

"She couldn't have known anything of the kind. That's quite impossible. Every precaution was taken to spare her a shock. I saw to it myself that all the arrangements were properly carried out. Last evening at dusk a car with two attendants from Wellwood Sanatorium drove up to the common, popped the poor fellow inside and took him away without a soul in the village being the wiser. I was there and saw the

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thing done. It went without a hitch. No one was by, that I will swear to. And then I went to Mrs. Bent and I said: 'Kindly tell Mrs. Smith that John may be late for his supper, and that if he is not home by ten o'clock he may not return tonight.' Not another word was said. Ever since I got the magistrates' order I have given the matter anxious consideration. The details of the plan were most carefully thought out in order to spare the poor old woman as much as possible, and to defeat public curiosity. Moreover, I am quite sure that unless Mrs. Bent exceeded her instructions, which is hardly likely to have been the case, the poor old thing could not have died from shock."

"Mrs. Bent's own version," said Edith, "is that as soon as she entered the cottage and before she spoke a word, Mrs. Smith said to her: 'Neighbor, you've come to tell me that they've taken my son. I shall never see him again this side the Resurrection. But I am not afraid. The God of Righteousness has promised to take care of me.' Mrs. Bent was quite astonished. She didn't know what was meant."

"How *could* Mrs. Smith have known? Who could have told her?"

"She said to Mrs. Bent that God Himself had appeared to her. Mrs. Bent saw that she was sinking

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even then. Dr. Joliffe was sent for at once, but before he could get there Mrs. Smith was dead."

The vicar was deeply moved by the tragic story. It was a sequel which he had not been able to foresee. The swiftness of the stroke in a measure softened the terrible sense of direct responsibility; none the less he was much upset.

As for Edith, the sequence of events had filled her with an emotion little short of horror. It was in her voice and her eyes as she now discussed them. A feeling of intolerable pain came upon her as she realized what a very important part in the tragedy she had played. It was her complaint against John Smith which lay at the root of all.

Father and daughter were very unhappy. Edith was inclined to blame herself more than she blamed the vicar. Her loyal nature was capable of great generosity, and it showed itself now in taking the chief share of the catastrophe upon herself. She was bound to believe that her father had taken a greatly exaggerated view of John Smith's heresies, but his sincerity was beyond question. The vicar's zeal had wrought irreparable harm, but knowing him for the man he was, it was impossible to blame him.

As soon as luncheon was over the vicar set out for Dr. Joliffe's. He was a man of strong, imperious

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will, and in this sudden flux of events he felt called to exercise it to the full. Had he done right? In spite of a limited horizon, in spite of a fixed determination not to allow himself a doubt in the matter, he was unable to prevent a sinister little demon leaping into his brain as he crossed the village green, and saw on the one hand a deserted pile of stone, on the other the lowered blinds of the widow's cottage.

It was futile to ask the question now. He could not call the dead to life. Nor could he revoke the processes of the law. John Smith was under lock and key at Wellwood Asylum for the good of the state. Armed with the opinion of Dr. Parker and Dr. Murfin, a Welbeck Street specialist, it had not been a difficult matter to convince the county bench that the realm would be the safer for a measure so drastic. But was it? All the vicar's power of will was needed to allay the horrid demon voice. In fact he had not quite succeeded by the time he entered Dr. Joliffe's gate.

As was to be expected, Joliffe had scant consolation to offer. "*Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin,*" was his attitude. The vicar had shown himse'f an obstinate, narrow man, and even if absolute sincerity and transparent honesty tormented his excuse, somehow it was not an easy one to accept.

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"Pity you didn't take advice," Joliffe ventured to remark.

"I don't reproach myself," said the vicar stiffly. "It had to be done. The public interest called for it. But I wish that old woman could have been spared the shock. Every precaution was taken, the removal was most carefully planned, the whole thing went without a hitch. I can't think how the news got out."

Dr. Joliffe confessed that he was equally at a loss. He had questioned Mrs. Bent closely upon the matter, and she had declared that John's mother had said that God had told her something terrible was going to happen to her son. He had told her also that they were about to be parted, and that she would never see him again in her present life.

"An amazing prepossession," said the vicar.

Dr. Joliffe was inclined to consider it a remarkable piece of clairvoyance.

"I was not aware that she laid claim to powers of that kind," said the vicar.

"Nor I," said the doctor. "Of course she was always an unusual sort of woman, and deeply religious."

"Evidently there was a great bond of sympathy between her and her son."

Dr. Joliffe agreed. There was reason, also, to believe that the son was a man of unusual powers.

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"Why do you think that?" said the vicar sharply.

"It is Brandon's opinion."

The vicar shook a grave head. "I'm sorry to say that Brandon's opinion is not conclusive, poor fellow. He is very far from being the man he was. Between ourselves I fear his mind is going."

The doctor was loth to admit so much. He greatly feared for Brandon, it was true; moreover John Smith had gained such an intellectual ascendancy over him that it seemed to point to the vicar's conclusion; at the same time Joliffe was unwilling to believe that Brandon's estimate of the man's genius was wholly the fruit of aberration.

"But," rejoined the vicar, "Brandon is a very highly educated man. And a highly educated man has no right to such an opinion."

"Well, you know, when I was in Brombridge the other day I met old Dunn, the high master of the grammar school where John Smith got his education. I asked him if he remembered him."

"Well?"

"Not only did he remember him, but he said that John Smith was by far the most remarkable boy who had ever passed through his hands."

"Then why didn't Dunn make something of him?"

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"Because the lad's health forbade hard regular study. Otherwise he must have gone far."

"That is more than one can believe."

"I can only say that Dunn is reckoned a first-rate judge of a boy's possibilities."

"Unduly partial to his own pupils I believe. It was on his advice and due to his interference that my gardener's eldest boy took his law final and became a solicitor, and I felt obliged to part with a good servant in consequence."

"This poor fellow is hardly a pupil to be proud of. Dunn says he looks upon it as the tragedy of his own scholastic life that such powers as John Smith's have borne no fruit. He had the most original mind of any boy he has known."

"In other words the most cranky mind," said the vicar impatiently. "I believe he has suffered all his life from hallucinations."

"Dunn didn't say that."

"Had he heard of the course we were taking?"

"He didn't mention the matter and I was careful not to refer to it. But I won't answer for Parker."

"Parker promised not to speak of it to anyone. It is known to Whymper and Jekyll and one other magistrate, and I believe was mentioned to General Clarke at the Depot, but in the public interest it was thought

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advisable not to let it go further. Not that it really matters. The man is of no importance anyway, and he is far better off where he now is. One will always regret the old mother, but the man himself will be extremely well cared for at a place like Wellwood."

"No doubt," said Dr. Joliffe rather drily.

"There again Brandon has behaved quixotically. After all, this man belongs to the working class. He would have been quite well looked after at the county asylum at Broad Hill, where such people are taken care of at the public charge. Still, that was done on your authority, Joliffe."

"Brandon insisted that it should be done."

"Well, it all goes to show that the dear fellow is not the man he was. Of course he's rich, but it will cost him at least five hundred a year for an indefinite period to keep this man at Wellwood."

"I pointed that out to him. But he had fully made up his mind. And he was so upset by the whole affair that it seemed wise not to raise difficulties."

"All very well. But I think my niece should have been consulted. However—there it is! But it's pure quixotism to say the least. By the way, does Brandon know what happened yesterday?"

"He knew nothing when I saw him this morning."

"How is he?"

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"Still confined to his room with lingering traces of a temperature."

"Had he heard that Murfin's report was unfavorable?"

"He takes it for granted."

"Takes it for granted! Pray why should he? I hope he doesn't think that Murfin is not entirely impartial and dependable."

"He has nothing against Murfin personally." There was a gleam of malice in Joliffe's eye. "But he says it is too much to hope for fair play for John Smith in such a world as the present."

"There speaks a disordered mind." Heat was in the vicar's tone. "We have taken every possible precaution. Brandon *must* realize that. Every consideration has been shown, and I am bound to say, speaking from first-hand knowledge, that our local bench has behaved in a most humane and enlightened manner."

"Brandon will not agree with you there, I fancy."

"Would he have had us send the man to jail?" Mr. Perry-Hennington's temperature was still going up steadily.

"He says John Smith has been condemned without a trial." For a reason Joliffe could not explain he was beginning to dislike the vicar intensely. "And he

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says that if the evidence is to be believed even Jesus had a trial."

"Monstrous!" said the vicar. "A perfectly monstrous parallel!"

XXVII

THE interview with Dr. Joliffe ruffled the vicar. The repetition of Brandon's words was ill-timed, nor was it easy to forgive Brandon for uttering them. Action had been taken in the public interest and Mr. Perry-Hennington could not endure a breath of criticism. One way and another it had cost him a good deal. It was only the inspiration of a high and pure motive and the fact that he had no personal ax to grind which had enabled him to carry out the most difficult, the most delicate, and quite the most thankless task in which he had ever been involved.

In the vicar's opinion he had reason to be satisfied with the finesse he had used; moreover, he had not the slightest doubt that the body politic, of which Brandon and Joliffe were members, had been laid under a deep obligation. Certainly he had no need to reproach himself in the matter. Without exciting remark of any kind, a very undesirable person, capable of doing infinite mischief, had been placed out of harm's way. Officious villagers had been referred to the police; and the vicar hoped to soften any stab his

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conscience might sustain in regard to the widow by defraying the expenses of her funeral out of his own pocket.

In the meantime Brandon had a severe relapse. Any hope of mental serenity had for a time been destroyed. The cause of his friend weighed upon him so heavily that at first it seemed he might not recover from the blow. He mourned him constantly and presently arose the fear that he was about to die.

In this perilous phase only one thing stood between the sufferer and the death which in many ways would have been welcome. The will to live was not evoked in him by wife or children or a sense of duty to society; in the last resort it was simply that he felt a sacred task had been laid upon him. His poor friend had been put out of life by the kind of stupidity against which the world has always been defenseless, and from which history is the only court of appeal. But the sense of a great wrong, which henceforward it must be his life's business to redress, somehow gave Brandon the motive power to continue an existence which had become almost unendurable.

He must find the means to vindicate his friend. Lying *in extremis*, with the life of the senses slipping out of his grasp, the idea produced a miraculous rebirth. It contained a germ of the central energy, faint

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and discreet, yet with the power to imbue a shattered existence with the will to be.

As soon as the new purpose took shape in his mind, he grew visibly stronger, in outward mental life at least. By now he had small hope or none that he would ever recover the use of his legs, but the sense of utter, futile weariness which had fastened upon him began to pass. And the new power came from a source deep down in the soul, of which for the first time he gained apperception.

For several weeks after the mischief had been wrought, Brandon declined to see the vicar. He did not impugn his sincerity. Too well he knew the nature of the man to believe that he had acted from a trivial or unworthy motive. But it seemed impossible for one of Brandon's liberal mind to forgive crass wrongheadedness raised to the *n*th power.

Now that the will to live had been evoked, Brandon clung with pathetic tenacity to any frail straw of hope of physical recovery. He felt within himself how slight they were, but as the weeks of slow torment passed he never quite gave up. All the resources of modern science were at his service and they were used to the full. No known means was neglected of restoring the vital current to the outraged organism. Massage and radiant heat were applied, electricity was

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shot through his skin, he submitted to the newest serums, the latest treatments, but the unhappy weeks went by and the sufferer remained dead from the waist down.

Indeed, the sole effect was that at last he was tempted to ask himself whether he had been wise in the first instance to drive the will to its almost superhuman effort to retain physical life. Time and again in these weeks of darkness that doubt recurred to him. The act of despotism of which he had been the witness, against which he had struggled with all the power he still possessed, weighed upon him increasingly. Somehow the whole miserable affair seemed to involve all the sources of his faith.

What was that faith? He had gone to the wars of his country in the spirit of a modern Crusader, of one not expecting too much from the world or his fellow men, of one who was inclined to regard almost the whole of the Bible as a legend, but yet a staunch believer in the essential decency of his own nation, his own people, and imbued with the idea that somewhere in the universe there was a God of Righteousness who was striving to create Himself.

But now a wound had been dealt him in the house of his friends.

XXVIII

FOR several months Brandon heard nothing of John Smith. Not able to write himself, he had not the courage to dictate a letter. In such circumstances there was nothing to be said which did not seem an impertinence, yet many times he was possessed by an intense desire to communicate. Day by day the man himself remained at the root of Brandon's thoughts.

In their last interview John had said that he had a great work to do. Although his fate had even then been foreshadowed, he had made that declaration; moreover, he had expressed a serene confidence that grace would be given for his task.

From the first Brandon had had a great curiosity as to what that task could be. Believing implicitly in the full mental and moral responsibility of his friend, he would not permit a doubt of his capacity. And yet it was only too likely that the conditions in which his life was now passed would paralyze a wonderful mind. Brandon had done all that lay in his power to lighten its lot; he had not spared money to

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provide reasonable comfort, reasonable amenity of surroundings; books and papers had gone to Wellwood from time to time; all that could be done by a friend's devotion had been done to sustain John Smith and keep his soul alive.

At last the silence was broken. Brandon received a letter from Wellwood, expressing deep gratitude for this solicitude. But it also expressed far more. It disclosed a penetration of thought, a power of vision, above all a real nobility of temper whose only parallel in the mind of Brandon was that of Socrates in similar but less degrading circumstances.

Somehow Brandon was comforted. The transcendent qualities he had long perceived in this man were here in their fullness. Amid the Stygian glooms of a world ever groping in darkness, a great light shone. In Brandon's opinion it was better to be immured with John Smith in Wellwood Sanatorium than to enjoy the sanctions of human freedom.

In the course of a full letter, which Brandon read again and again, John Smith referred to a work upon which he was engaged. He was going forward with his task, and with the help of others it was nearing fulfillment. He did not disclose what the task was, nor did he refer to "the others" specifically.

Weeks passed. Visibly helped by John Smith's

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letter, Brandon, to the joy of his friends, regained much of his mental poise. The dark clouds of a few months back were slowly dispersed, but in body he remained inert, and now without hope of cure. And then one morning at the beginning of December there came a second letter from Wellwood.

It merely contained these words: "Come soon. I need you."

Such authoritative brevity was for Brandon a command which he felt he must obey. But he was at once aware that he could only get to Wellwood in the teeth of a junta. Wife, doctor, nurse, all had very strong reasons to urge against a journey of nearly twenty miles in the middle of winter to such a place on such a pretext. To them the summons itself was the caprice of an unsound mind, the wis. to obey it the whim of a sick man.

But in this, as they were to learn, they underrated the forces now at work. Fully set on obeying the summons, Brandon would brook no refusal. In vain Millicent dissuaded, in vain Joliffe and the nurse issued a ukase. Come what might he must see John Smith; if the heavens fell he must go to Wellwood.

Opposition raised Brandon's will to such a pitch that at last his guardians had to consider the question very seriously. And they reluctantly saw that beyond

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the amount of trouble involved there was no real reason why he should not have his way. Prejudice, it was true, also entered into the matter; doctor and nurse agreed that it could not be good for a sick man to visit such a place as Wellwood. But the sick man declared he alone must be judge of that; and as a growing excitement threatened a return of fever, consent was reluctantly given for a letter to be written to the chief medical officer at Wellwood for permission to see John Smith.

Millicent Brandon wrote the letter at the invalid's dictation, devoutly hoping the while that its purpose would fail. Alas for the frailty of human hopes in the scale of official perversity! By return of post came full permission to visit the patient at any time. In the presence of this bombshell nothing was left but to submit with a good grace to the inevitable.

Accordingly, in the gray of a December afternoon, Brandon made the journey to Wellwood by motor. It hardly took an hour. Little of the landscape was visible in the winter half-light, and the place itself was unable to reveal the beauties of its setting. Run on modern lines with accommodation for a hundred patients, it had the comforts of a home to offer and a very great deal in the way of human kindness. To one in John Smith's rank of life it was a place of

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luxury; to those whose lot had been cast on more liberal lines there was little to complain of in regard to food, housing, reasonable recreation. Yet to each and all of its inmates, from the most open and amenable to the most sullen and defiant, it had one truly dreadful drawback. They were not there of their own free will, but were held by the order of the State.

That simple but terrible fact galled one and all like a chain. And few cherished any real hope of ever getting free. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," might have been engraved above the pleasant portals of this polite prison. Once behind those doors, the young and the old alike felt themselves caught in the meshes of a deep-laid conspiracy, of a darkness and a subtlety beyond belief. Every attempt at freedom was a struggle against fate, every effort to break the fetters of the law riveted them more securely. From time to time the patients were visited by doctors, magistrates, clergymen, commissioners in lunacy, but these came as a concession to the wisdom and humanity of an abstract conception. Insight, hope, healing, came not in their train.

Brandon felt a sudden chill of soul as he was lifted by his chauffeur and his valet from the car and carried into the light and the suffocating warmth beyond

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those ornate, nail-studded doors. The place was overheated, yet to Brandon it had an effect of sudden immersion in icy water. There was something in its atmosphere which struck right down to the roots of his being. It was so subtle yet so deadly that a nausea came upon him. And yet, as he was soon to realize, this emotion had its source in his own weakness, in his own state of extreme mental tension.

Brandon was carried into a private room and was there received by the chief medical officer, Dr. Thorp, to whom he was known by hearsay. And it was his privilege to have a conversation with a humane and enlightened man, which interested him profoundly.

Dr. Thorp stood very high in his profession, and his many years' experience of mental cases was wide and deep. For him the subject with which he dealt, terrible as it was, had an all-absorbing interest. It offered to the researches of science a boundless field; moreover, this expert had a power over himself, and was therefore able to keep a sane, cool, balanced judgment in the midst of perils which too often overthrew his fellow workers. In a word, he could detach the part from the whole and so prevent the mind from being subdued to that in which it worked.

In Dr. Thorp's cozy room, under the bust of Æsculapius, Brandon had a talk in which he learned many

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things. The chief medical officer spoke with a frankness, a fair-minded desire to be impartial, which Brandon somehow had not looked for. To begin with he did not hesitate to describe the case of John Smith as quite the most remarkable that had ever come into his ken. And the fact that Brandon had known him intimately for many years, that he had always been his friend and champion, and that grievously stricken as he was, he had come to see him now, appeared in the eyes of Dr. Thorp to give this visitor an importance altogether unusual.

"I welcome you here, Mr. Brandon, for several reasons," he said. "Apart from the fact that you pay John's bills every quarter, and that he always speaks of you in the most affectionate terms, I am hoping that you will be able to add to our knowledge of the dear fellow himself."

Somehow Brandon was a little startled by the epithet. It had an odd sound on official lips. He would have expected it to fall almost as soon from the governor of a jail. The doctor met Brandon's look of surprise with a smile. "It's the only way to describe him," he said. "But he is a great puzzle to us all. And if in any way you can help us to solve him we shall be much in your debt."

"There is little I can tell you," said Brandon, "that

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you don't already know, 'And that little I'll preface with a simple statement which I hope will not annoy you too much. It's my unshakable belief that John Smith ought not to be here."

A perceptible shadow crossed the alert face of Dr. Thorp. "It is my province to disagree with you," he said very gravely. "Not for a moment could I allow myself to hold anyone here against his will if I thought him entirely sane, normal, rational."

"I readily understand that," said Brandon with his air of charming courtesy. "But may I ask what means are open to you in an institution of this kind of forming an impartial judgment?"

Dr. Thorp answered the question with a frankness which greatly prepossessed Brandon in his favor. "I readily admit that for us here an impartial judgment is hardly possible. John Smith has been certified insane in the particular way that the law requires, and we are only able to approach his case in the light of that knowledge."

"Yes, that I quite understand. But may I ask this question? Had John Smith not been certified as a lunatic when he came here, had he, let us assume, come here on probation, could you conscientiously certify him by the light of your present knowledge?"

"You have asked a most difficult question, but I

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will answer it as well as I can. As a private individual, although he shows certain symptoms which sooner or later are bound, in my judgment, to lead to serious mental derangement, he is not likely at present to do actual harm; in fact he is capable of doing positive good; but of course, in a time like this he has to be considered as a political entity, and it is on these grounds I understand that he is here to be taken care of until the war is over."

"*Prima facie*, that is true," said Brandon. "In other words, a man of pure and noble genius is the victim of a shallow, sectarian ignorance which deserves to be the laughing-stock of the universe."

The words were extravagant, and a certain violence of gesture accompanied them, but the reaction of Dr. Thorp was serious, even troubled. "You are bent on involving me in the most difficult problem of my experience," he said, after a pause.

"I am. And perhaps—who knows?—in the most difficult problem the civilized world has yet had to face."

"As you say, who knows?" said Dr. Thorp, a cloud growing on his sensitive face.

"In other words," said Brandon, "you are ready to admit that a man of very profound and beautiful genius is being held here."

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"Those are big words," was the reply of professional caution. "And genius is of many kinds. But speaking of John Smith as I have found him, I will make an admission which you are entitled to use as you think fit. We all bless the day he came here."

A look of startled pleasure came into Brandon's face. "One somehow expected to hear that," he said.

"Whatever his mentality may be, and of its range I am not competent to judge, the man has what I can only call a largeness of soul which has an effect upon others. One of our old men, one of our deranged fine intellects, of whom we have several, and very pathetic they are, has christened him the Light-Bringer, and somehow we feel it is a title that he thoroughly deserves."

"That is to say, he is a good influence among your patients?"

"Yes; in fact a moral force. The staff tell me that since he came here their work is less by one-half. As an instance of what I mean, let me give you a little anecdote which our head attendant told me only this morning. We have an old German professor, who has been here some time. He is apt to be very cantankerous and now and again gives a great deal of trouble. On his bad days no one can do anything with him. But it seems that John is now an established

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exception to the rule and that he can simply make him do anything. This morning it appears the Herr Professor had decided that he would no longer wear a tie. 'Put it on at once,' said Boswell, our head attendant. 'I shall not,' said the Herr Professor, 'except by the command of God and the Emperor.' 'Very well,' said the head attendant, 'then I shall ask the Master to come to you.' Well, the Master came—that, by the way, is the name the patients have given him. The head attendant stated his case and the Master said to the Herr Professor, 'Put on your tie, my dear friend. It is the rule here in Elysium and you are bound to obey it. Otherwise the gods will turn you out and you may find yourself wandering in outer darkness for another hundred years or so.'"

"And did the Herr Professor put on his tie?" asked Brandon.

"He put it on at once," said Dr. Thorp with a laugh. "Of course it's a very trivial anecdote. But to me the whole thing is a remarkable piece of make-believe."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand."

"Well, you see, our friend John has persuaded the old fellow that he is Goethe, talks to him in German and treats him with a deference which raises a smile. And the odd side of the affair is that the poor old

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chap now firmly believes himself to be Goethe and does his best to act up to his part."

"I see," said Brandon.

"And John Smith has taught us already that in the administration of a place of this kind, there is practically no limit to the power of suggestion. We have a hundred patients here, and his power over them is astonishing. There seems to be nothing he can't make some of them do; and as he is a great upholder of law and order we bless the day he came among us."

"As I understand your theory, this moral ascendancy has been gained over your patients by the power of suggestion?"

"Yes; to put it crudely the effect he has upon them is a kind of hypnotism of the imagination. For instance, a truly remarkable case is that of a man who might once have done great things in music. Another German by the way. But for years he has been mentally deranged. Yet in his case John Smith seems to have performed a miracle. By his power of sympathy he has hypnotized the man into composing some quite wonderful music. From time to time he plays it to us. The other day I got a friend of mine who really understands the subject to come and hear it. He says it had such a quality that he can only compare it to Beethoven."

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"Indeed!" said Brandon.

Dr. Thorp laughed. "And the oddest part of the whole matter is that the music only came to be written because John Smith was able to persuade our poor friend that he really was Beethoven."

"Again the power of suggestion?"

"Undoubtedly. And one that deserves to become a classical instance of the power of sympathetic imagination rightly applied. I am not sure that John Smith is not a great thinker who has discovered a profound truth."

"I am inclined to believe that he has discovered more than one." A glow of excitement had begun to course in Brandon's veins.

"At any rate," said the doctor, "I defy anyone to see him here in the midst of our patients—very obscure and baffling mental cases, some of them are—without a feeling that he wields a quite remarkable power over certain types of his fellow creatures."

"One is immensely interested to know that."

"It is hardly too much to say that the atmosphere of the whole place has changed. Six months ago we could hope for nothing better than the sullen bickerings of Bedlam; today certain of our best cases are rising to a kind of high intellectuality which, I frankly confess, is amazing."

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"And this you attribute to the direct influence of John Smith?"

"It is the only way to account for it."

"Can you put into words the precise form it takes?"

"In a few minutes I hope you will be able to judge for yourself. In the meantime perhaps you will join me in a cup of tea." And in deference to the sudden arrival of a well-filled tray, Dr. Thorp suspended for a moment further consideration of the subject.

XXIX

TEA was Brandon's favorite beverage. And this afternoon it seemed to work a wonder upon him. It caused his veins to thrill and burn with an exhilaration he had never expected to feel again.

"I learn from our amazing friend," said Dr. Thorp, pointing a finger at the tray, "that one of the most powerful deities of the astral world is in that teapot."

"He seems," said Brandon, "to have taken all imagination for his province."

"He lives upon the theory, nothing is but thinking makes it so. He says if one can only grasp it truly, it covers all the phenomena in the universe."

"In other words," said Brandon with a smile, "you are not ashamed to sit at the feet of the prophet who has come into your midst."

"I confess it. I confess it frankly and fully." And the doctor laughed.

Brandon felt a thrill of delight. He was like a chemist who learns from a flame in his test tube that he has not deceived himself, and that his great discovery has received the sanction of science.

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"Yes, his theories are wonderful," said the doctor, perhaps in answer to the eager look on Brandon's face. "Moreover, he has an extraordinary faculty of putting them into practice. Many little changes in the life here are due to him. They all make for greater harmony. Somehow, he oils the wheels of our intercourse. And there is one innovation you shall see for yourself if you care to do so."

"There is nothing I should like so much."

"It is one of his devices for keeping our best people amused and interested. He says ideas are the life of the soul, and that creative imagination is its highest function. And he has formed a sort of debating society, which meets every afternoon to discuss the problems of the present and the future."

"Are your patients able to discuss them reasonably?"

"Not merely reasonably, I venture to say profoundly. We have some intellectuals here, men who have read and thought perhaps too much, whose brains have given out before their time. And then in all institutions of this kind there are queer, freakish intellects, capable of an intermittent brilliancy although unfit for the routine of practical life, while some of the old men whom we take care of in their declining years have been men of attainment in the heyday of

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their powers. I tell you all this, because what you are about to see will most probably astonish you. John Smith wields a marvelous regenerative influence in this institution, and I want you to see it at work."

"I shall be delighted to do so."

"Very well. But let us first find out whether the portents are favorable." Thereupon with a smile Dr. Thorp rose and pressed the button of an electric bell three times.

Presently the summons was answered by no less a person than the head attendant, a tall, deliberate, very dour looking Scotsman.

"Boswell," said Dr. Thorp, as it seemed to Brandon, with a twinkle in his eye, "is the Court sitting this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir," said the head attendant with perfect gravity. "The Master took the chair at three o'clock."

"What are they discussing?"

"Germany, sir." The head attendant spoke with a slow solemnity which nearly provoked Brandon to a laugh. "*Toujours l'Allemagne*," said the doctor. "Still the only question for the Court."

"And likely to be for some little time yet, sir," said Boswell impressively. "What they are now trying to arrive at is, can Germany be readmitted on any terms to the comity of nations?"

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"But they were dealing with that question a month ago."

"Well, sir, they are at it still. And I'm afraid they don't get much forwarder."

"Any good speeches this afternoon?"

"Two of the best we've had yet, sir. They seem to get better and better."

At the note of enthusiasm in the voice of the head attendant, Dr. Thorp directed a glance, half pride, half amusement at his visitor.

"We had Abraham on his legs again, sir. He gave us a regular rasper."

"For your information," said the doctor to Brandon dryly, "Abraham is none other than Abraham Lincoln."

"He didn't half let Germany have it, sir." The tone of the head attendant was curiously grim.

"How did Goethe take it?" asked the doctor with a chuckle.

"Like a lamb, sir. He just sat in the corner crying like a child."

Dr. Thorp rose and took a pipe from the chimney-piece.

"The proceedings opened this afternoon, sir," Boswell continued, "with a speech from Tolstoi. And very nice, too, sir; perhaps a little sloppy in places, but

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very good in its way. I should like you to have heard it, sir."

"I should like to have done so." The doctor's tone was half pride, half amused indulgence.

"Universal brotherhood was his ticket, sir. Rights of man. Nonresistance to evil and so on. Of course it doesn't quite work out, but it was a very creditable effort, very creditable indeed—especially for an old man who can't button his own collar."

"Quite so," said the doctor.

"And I think you'll like to know, sir"—a note of pride entered the head attendant's voice—"that we also had a speech from the brother who came here the other day from Broad Hill. It was his first attempt, and to my mind one of the best yet."

"That's interesting," said the doctor, smiling at Brandon. "What's his name, by the way?"

"The Master introduced him as Spinoza."

"I hope he was well received."

"He was, sir, and yet not altogether as you might say. Both Plato and Aristotle seemed inclined to criticize him, and they were dead set against his proposal that Germany should be more fully represented. Spinoza seemed to think that she was entitled to more friends than Goethe and himself and Beethoven."

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"I wonder, I wonder," Brandon interposed in a soft, far-away voice.

"Spinoza thought that Luther, Kant and Leibnitz ought also to be allowed to speak for her."

"But those names are not on the register."

"Several of the brethren pointed that out, sir, but the Master said if the Court decided that Germany was entitled to call them, there would be no difficulty in causing them to appear."

"Then I hope the Court decided in Spinoza's favor," said Dr. Thorp. "It will be interesting to see how the Master contrives to make good his promise."

"When I left them, sir, they were arguing the question. But it will not surprise me if they decide against the proposal."

"What reason have you for thinking so?" asked Brandon.

"It's Plato's opinion, sir," said Boswell, very impressively, "that Germany, having betrayed her religion, and having perverted her science, neither Luther nor Leibnitz has any *locus standi*, and as far as Kant is concerned he agrees with Aristotle that the Court has too many philosophers already."

"And he carries great weight, I presume?" said Brandon.

"If Plato's against the proposal, sir," said the head

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attendant still very impressively, "they'll rule it out, unless the Master himself intervenes."

"Yes, and rightly," said Dr. Thorp. "Before his mental breakdown, some years ago, he was a man of great parts, a professor of Greek at Cambridge, a beautiful speaker. Now that John Smith has taken him in hand we are delighted to think that his fine powers are being reawakened. When he is in his best form it is well worth anyone's while to hear him. What is he like this afternoon, Boswell?"

"I've never heard him to better advantage, sir," said the head attendant, with a slow and proud solemnity. "He's quite a treat, especially to a man like myself, who all my life have made a hobby of philosophy."

"Then let us go and hear what he has to say."

XXX

BRANDON was carried in his chair along a dimly lighted corridor. At the end of it was a large room, lit more dimly still, in which, as it seemed, a number of ghostly figures were seated round the fireplace. For the most part they were old, bearded men, and they were smoking their pipes and listening with grave attention to one of their number, who was addressing them in a low, soft, persuasive voice.

Brandon was borne in very quietly by the doctor and the head attendant. He was placed at the back of the room, at the farthest point from the group around the fire. His entrance, even if observed, excited no attention. Without a moment's interruption, the charming voice, whose every word was clear and distinct, continued as if nothing was happening.

To Brandon the whole thing was like a dream. The ghostly half-light in which the speaker and his audience was wrapped, the flicker of the distant fire, the curious stillness which the soft voice seemed to en-

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hance, all added their touch of eeriness to the scene. Suddenly Brandon was stung to an imaginative intensity he had never felt before. The image of the spectrum altered, and he was completely possessed by a weird feeling that he had made the descent into Hades.

In a kind of entrancement he listened to the voice. It seemed a little older than the world, and yet he had heard it many times, as it seemed in many ages, for every word it used was somehow enchantingly familiar. Even the fall of the sentences, the rhythm of the phrases was like music in his ears. Whose voice could it be? It was a dream voice that swept his soul back through unnumbered ages, and yet now with full authority upon his senses in the terrestrial phase of being. He knew he was in the presence of a great mystery, and yet hearing that voice he was filled with strange joy.

"Plato," whispered the doctor at his side.

Somehow the entranced listener felt that such a voice, touched by a divine grace, could have belonged to no one else.

"My friends"—as the words floated upon Brandon's ear, they seemed to submerge his senses—"what is the race of men to do? The goal was in sight. Its sons were about to enter the kingdom their prayers and their fidelity to the gods had won for them, when one

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among them betrayed his brethren without pity and without shame. The tragedy has happened more than once in the history of an ill-starred planet, but as you have lately learned from the lips of Herodotus the circumstances of this case exceed all others in their poignancy.

"Those who have kept the faith, who have not profaned the high and awful mysteries to which in youth they were inducted, are permitted by the gods to assemble in the Court of First and Last Instance, to consider a most terrible Apostasy. They are to judge by the light of all the circumstances, they are to make their recommendations in accordance therewith.

"The Court is agreed that it is in the presence of the worst crime in its archives. A deed has been done that words cannot paint, a horror wrought which Justice cannot condone. Yet here among the wise and the good, as you have heard, are those who invoke in the name of the gods, the divine clemency for the doers of this evil.

"Some who speak for the Apostate have pleaded that the onus is not upon the common people of an outlaw state, but upon its ruler and guardians. This Court is asked to make a distinction between those whose innocence was wrought upon by cunning, who were goaded by fear to those bestial acts, which will

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cause the very name they bear to stink for generations in the nostrils of men, and the savage lust, the ignoble greed of those who held the reins of power. It is said that what they did they could not help doing. In the name of the Highest, appeal is made to the universal brotherhood existing among men, which they betrayed without pity and without remorse.

"Let me remind you, that pray for a miserable and perverted people, of the words of Socrates. He has said that the citizens of a state must in all circumstances accept full responsibility for its rulers. Whatever the form of its government, it is neither better nor worse than it deserves. And he has said that as the commonalty yearned to fatten on the spoils of victory, it is the divine justice that it drink the cup of defeat to the last drop of its bitterness.

"My friends, emboldened by the words of an inspired teacher, I ask you to take care lest mercy become weakness, and weakness supine folly. This is a conflict of philosophies, but even if the gods are many, Justice and Truth are one.

"It follows, therefore, that there can be no compromise between the evil and the good. Violence and insult have been offered to mankind, to the divine justice, and therefore to that Heaven in which we hope

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to dwell. With those who have kept the faith, I ask that a pitiless crime be punished without pity.

"According to the old law, those who offend the gods suffer banishment. The very name they bear is forever accursed, they are shunned by the virtuous, they suffer eternal ostracism and the death of the soul. In the name of all that is sacred, I ask that the law now take its course. Let those who drew the sword perish by the sword. Let them and their kindred, their children, and their children's children be cast out forever. Such is the demand of justice. By no decree less awful can it be met."

There came silence. The voice, to whose every word Brandon had listened in a kind of entrancement, could be heard no longer. He strained his eyes and his ears, but through the haze of shadows he was unable to distinguish the speaker among those seated round the fire. The hush that followed excited him strangely. And then another voice was heard, a voice remote yet familiar, which seemed to cause his heart to break inside him.

"Brethren"—the new voice was curiously soft and gentle, yet its every word was like a sword—"I am the eye of the west wind. I am the voice of the evening star. I am one with Brahm. I am the soul of Islam. I am the destined Buddha. I am the Light of the

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World, and I say to you there is no crime that cannot be purged by the Father's love.

"I stand here at the apex of this world's history, and I say to you the old way is not enough. If the spirit of Man is not to bleed in vain, if the sorrowing earth is to yield the fruits for which her sons have died, the God of Righteousness must be avenged by the God of Love.

"The Father's kingdom is the hearts of men. And I say to you, unless the Son of Man came in vain among you, my word shall not be as Dead Sea fruit. I speak not to a party or a sect, but to all who would keep the faith, of whatever countenance or caste.

"In this slender folio which I hold in my hand is contained the divine genius of the ancient and the modern world, the gold of its dreams, the bread of its aspiration. The souls of the just through whom the Father spoke of old time have been summoned anew; the prophets, the magicians, the makers of harmony, have been gathered together, so that the terms of the Truce may take visible shape in the sight of all nations.

"I say to you, let none oppose it. This Mandate speaks to the bosoms and the business of men. Through it man shall cast off his chains. Through it he shall hear the voice of his Father, which is in

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Heaven. The Kingdom shall be made manifest; and all wars shall cease; and this old unhappy earth shall see the light of the promised day.

"There are strong spirits who do not approve this Mandate. They have their place in the hierarchy; they are of the chosen friends of mankind; sacred Hellas and imperial Rome are with them; they have the sanction of the elder gods, but I say to them, judge not that you be not judged. The Apostate has sinned against the Light, but millions of her children have been purified by sacrifice. Man may live a slave, and in a vile cause may die a king. The enemy of the human race has bred great souls. And in the last account let these stand the surety of her that bred them. Therefore I say to you again, judge not that you be not judged."

There was a pause of curious intensity. When the familiar voice ceased for a moment, Brandon, as if in a dream, peered through the stifling silence to the figures round the fire. One there was standing in their midst, whom he could not yet see, but of whose magical presence his every fiber was aware. Suddenly he caught a gesture of the uplifted head and the voice flowed on.

"Empires and kings shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away. And I say to those who pray

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for the Apostate, let her cast out the devil in her entrails and return to the old way. Let her seek again the voice of the Father in the trees and the grass, the rivers and the mountains, let her weave again her enchanted harmonies in homage of the Love He bears her. Then shall her fields again grow fruitful, the sweet past shall renew itself with increase, her grateful brothers in science shall again take her hand.

"I see around me the souls of the saints waiting to be reborn. Through unnumbered ages they have held on high the lamp of Truth. Let them return to a sweeter world, a world enkindled and renewed in the Father's Love.

"Here, in the presence of all that is, and all that was, I affirm the Beautiful, and the Good.

"I affirm Justice, Truth, *and* Mercy.

"I affirm the universal brotherhood of men.

"I say to you, fear God, honor the King; which being interpreted means, obey the Law.

"See the Father in all things.

"I say to you finally, man is the question, God is the answer.

"This is the law and the prophets. If you would see the Kingdom deny it not."

Again the voice ceased, and Brandon heard the doctor's whisper: "The Master is at his best this

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afternoon. It is better not to interrupt him if you don't mind. He will come to you presently. He knows you are here."

Brandon shook violently. Possessed by an excitement now almost terrible, he was unable to speak.

XXXI

HE is coming now," the doctor whispered. "I will leave you for a little while so that you may talk without interruption." And the doctor passed out noiselessly.

Silence had fallen again at the other end of the long room. Brandon was sensible of a faint stir among the dim figures round the fire. And then his heart leaped to his throat, his veins seemed to run with flame as there emerged and came slowly toward him an outline wholly different from that of the man he expected to see. John Smith—if John Smith it was!—had let his hair grow long, he had acquired a beard, and he wore a loose robe tied round his middle by a cord.

The wide-pupiled eyes and the strange pallor of the face struck with vivid intensity through the ghostly half-light of the room.

The shock of this appearance was like a knife in Brandon's flesh.

"Dear friend"—even the voice had changed—"you have heard great argument. And here is the matter

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of it." A manuscript bound in brown paper was placed in Brandon's hands. "I charge you in the name of humanity to give this to the world with the Father's love."

A shiver of strange joy passed through the frame of the stricken man. The simple words pierced to a hidden spring. Forces long pent were released within him, new light, new power, seemed to suffuse him. Enfolded by his presence, he was conscious of a kind of rapture which was like a rebirth. He felt the caress of lips on his forehead, the great eyes sank into him. And then came the voice, familiar and yet strange, "Faithful servant, if you believe in me rise from your bed and walk."

The words were as a fire. In the same tone of gentleness they were repeated, and Brandon felt the icy touch of a hand upon his cheek. His heart seemed to break and thrill with joy, as, overborne by an anguish of feeling, he suddenly rose from his chair and cast himself at the feet of him in whose presence he was.

"Master!" he cried. "Master!"

XXXII

IN the course of a few minutes two attendants entered for the purpose of conveying the visitor to the doctor's room. Brandon returned to his chair, his friend bade him good-by, and then the sufferer allowed himself to be carried down the corridor as if nothing had happened.

His brain was in a state of wild ferment, yet he was sufficiently its master to refrain from letting Dr. Thorp know that the power of motion had returned to his limbs. At the instance of faith he had risen from his bed and walked, but now was not the time to proclaim a miracle in the sight of men.

"I hope you had an interesting talk with our friend," said the doctor, with a smile of professional politeness. "And what is that I see? Is that the great work? How high you must stand in his favor!" The voice of the doctor rose to a sympathetic laugh. "You should be a proud man. Quite extraordinary pains have been bestowed upon it by him and his friends here."

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"Have you read it?" asked Brandon, the blood drumming in his ears.

"Oh, yea."

Brandon, startled by the sound of his own voice, had just enough courage to ask the doctor's opinion of the play.

Dr. Thorp replied with a happy frankness: "Don't laugh at me if I confess that to my mind it's a sublime work."

"You really think so?"

"I do, and I'll tell you why. There's such a great idea at the back of it, that I feel a better, a stronger, a saner man for having come in contact with it. That play takes one into another world. It draws aside the curtain, and gives us harassed mortals a peep into the kingdom of the Something Else. Nothing is but thinking makes it so. Believe me, that's a sublime conception. And the Master has made us all feel here that we have a share in it. Shakespeare, Molière, Sophocles, Menander, and other august old gentlemen you saw round the fire in the other room, have all been consulted, and Beethoven has composed some enchanting music for it, so we can't help thinking it wonderful." The doctor's laugh was now a note of pure joy. "Believe me, in its way, the whole thing is incomparable."

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"What is the title?"

"It is called, 'A Play Without a Name,' but I am convinced that it ought to be called, 'The Something Else,' or 'The Power of Love.' And although you'll begin to doubt my sanity, I can't help feeling that if the play were performed in every town in Europe at the present hour, it would be the beginning of a new era for the human race."

"That is to say, the whole world might be born again through the power of the spoken word."

"Exactly," said the doctor, with enthusiasm. "And that, by the way, is what the author aims at. Of course you realize what his particular form of delusion is, and you will have noticed that he begins to bear a remarkable resemblance to his prototype."

"Yes," said Brandon, in a hushed, broken tone, "it's quite uncanny."

XXXIII

BRANDON returned to Hart's Ghyll ostensibly as he had left it. Without telling his wife what had happened, he allowed himself to be carried to his room and put to bed. For one thing he was worn out with the strange excitement of the afternoon. The visit to Wellwood had made so great a call on a devitalized nervous system, that he now felt rather feverish and overstrung. But as he sank on his pillows in a reaction of weariness, nature insisted that for a time he should forget.

As he lay trying to reconstruct the amazing experience he had just been through, a vague, delicious sense of mystery flowed through him. But it was for a moment only. He had hardly time to ask himself whether the new life was still in his limbs when sleep stole upon him, and the chain of his thought was broken.

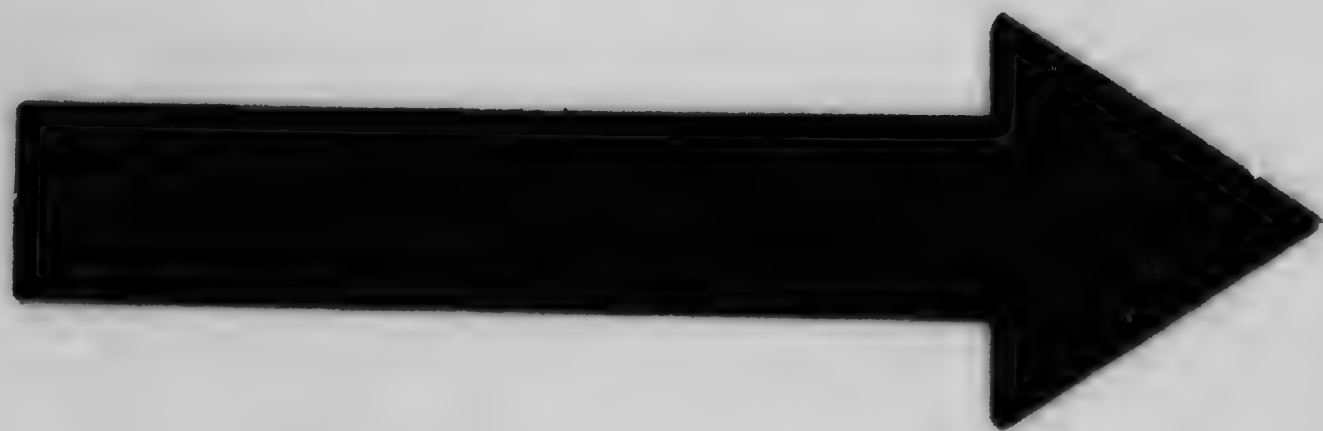
How long his sleep lasted he didn't know. But it was heavy, dreamless and profound, and he awoke in the pitch darkness of a December night. Almost his

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first sensation was that something had happened, something which had forever changed the current of his life. What could it be? Before the question was answered, before he could relate himself to the life of the senses, and the mind could gain perception of itself, he grew conscious of a thought half formed. It was full of strange joy, of strange fear. Then he tried to cast his mind back, and in the very act of doing so, he suddenly heard a voice in the room: "If you believe in me rise from your bed and walk."

Involuntarily he sat up, flung aside the bedclothes, pressed his lifeless feet upon the carpet. An instant he stood swaying, expecting to fall, and then he felt himself sustained by a new power. Foot by foot he groped his way to the window and drew its curtains aside.

The risen moon was shining on the trees of the park. As its cold light flowed into Brandon's eyes, he was able to assure himself that he was fully awake. He was able to assure himself that a miracle had made him whole, and that his being was rooted now in some subtle but profound alchemy of the soul. For long he stood looking out on the night, while a growing joy prevailed him. Tears of pure happiness, whose shedding was an exquisite physical relief, ran down his cheeks. Again and again his flesh responded to the

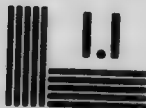


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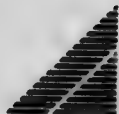
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thrill of a recollected touch; a rapture he had never known coursed through his veins; his bonds were broken; he was borne upon the wings of a new destiny.

Almost delirious with joy he got back into bed, and lay a long hour shivering with excitement. Even now he hardly dared to meet the hard logic of the matter. The events of yesterday besieged him like a fantastic dream. He had risen from his bed, and he had walked at the command of One in whom he had implicitly believed. But at this moment he dare not ask himself to restate that faith in its superhuman aspect.

Long before daylight came, his thoughts had grown so insurgent, that he put out a hand and switched on the light. On a table by his bed was laid the manuscript he had brought from Wellwood. In an ecstasy of growing bewilderment he turned to it now, devouring it greedily, almost with a sense of ravishment.

It was called simply, 'A Play Without a Name.' It set forth a "religion of humanity," in a series of parables crystal-clear to the humblest mind, yet by a superhuman cunning, as it seemed to Brandon, fulfilling the laws which govern the enchanting art of the dramatist. The action had been devised for representation, the words that they might be spoken in the theater. The theme was the power of love, human

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and divine, and it was illustrated by vivid, moving, beautiful pictures.

Daylight found Brandon still pondering this wonderful play. He was now in the thrall of an all-absorbing event. A few hours back he had passed through a miraculous experience, and the problem now was to relate it to the known facts of organic life. The difficulties of the situation were foreshadowed as soon as the nurse came into the room.

"Who has drawn back the curtains?" she demanded at once, in a tone of stern surprise.

Brandon, in spite of his excitement, was able to affect a torpid indifference to the question.

"I could have taken an oath," said the nurse, "that when I left you last night the curtains were pulled across the window as usual!"

XXXIV

ON the afternoon of the following day, Millicent Brandon took the great news to the vicarage, that Gervase had walked across the room.

It was a thrilling announcement, and Millicent's excitement was reflected in Edith and the vicar, for like all his friends they had given up hope that he would ever walk again.

It appeared that something very like a miracle had happened. And, strange to say, it coincided with the visit to Wellwood. But doctor and nurse were loath to believe that that unsanctioned journey had anything to do with a most astonishing matter. As for Brandon himself, walking the path of an extreme wariness in the midst of new and overwhelming perplexities, he was very careful not to claim it as the fount of healing.

A week passed, a truly wonderful week of returning life, of unsealed physical power. The sensory apparatus had been repaired, the dead limbs were again alive, the sufferer had risen from his bed; and in his own mind it was absolutely clear to what agency

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the fact was due. Moreover, it carried with it a very special obligation.

Brandon had never regarded himself as a religious man. Before he went to the wars of his country he had been a skeptic. He understood well enough the great part faith had played in human affairs, but he had conceived it as the fruit of a peculiar mental and physical constitution. He knew that the religious sense had the power to create an amazing world of its own, but he had been glad to think that he could meet the facts of existence without its aid. Now, however, he felt himself to be a new Faust, who had sold himself, not to the devil, but to the Christian God. He had been miraculously restored to physical health, but only on condition that he obeyed without mental reservation of any kind, the implicit will of Another.

He must lay all questioning aside. Body and soul were now in the care of a superhuman power. He had entered into a most solemn pact, to whose fulfillment he must bend the whole force of his will. And its first fruits were to be seen in a letter which he addressed to an old school and college friend, one Robert Pomfret, urging him to come and spend Christmas at Hart's Ghyll.

Brandon hardly dared to hope that the letter would succeed in its purpose. There was little in such an

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invitation to lure a regular man of the town from his accustomed round. But the unexpected happened. Pomfret, being "at a loose end" in Christmas week, found his way to Hart's Ghyll, prompted, no doubt, by a generous desire to cheer up an old friend in the hour of affliction.

The two men were curiously unlike. Pomfret was not a creature of delicate perceptions, or intellectual curiosity. Apart from a large and rich geniality, which endeared him to a wide circle of acquaintances, he was merely a shrewd, eupeptic man of business, whose supreme merit was, that he knew exactly how many beans made five. But a subtle bond may exist between diverse characters, if each is sound at the core, and in this case a humorous respect was paid to the other's peculiar qualities.

Brandon was delighted, and perhaps just a little flattered by the arrival of his sagacious friend on Christmas Eve. He had not dared to hope that a casual note, at such short notice, would lure a pagan and worldling from his orbit. But a divinity shapes our ends. His old fagmaster at school was the one man of practical experience to whom Brandon could turn in the difficult and unknown country he had now to traverse. Robert Pomfret had really been summoned to Hart's Ghyll, not as he innocently and mag-

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unanimously believed, on the score of old friendship, but in his capacity of prosperous lessee of three West End theaters.

It was not until Christmas Day was far spent that the host disclosed his fell design. Immediately after dinner he contrived to get the redoubtable Robert into the library on the plea of "a little advice on an important matter," without his victim suspecting the trap that had been laid for him. Brandon, moreover, led up to the subject with the discretion of a statesman. And then, in order to get a direct and reasoned verdict, he read aloud the first act.

His own experience of the stage was confined to one appearance with the O. U. D. S. in a very humble part. Moreover, his knowledge of general theatrical conditions was extremely slight. At the same time he knew that for a tyro to force the portals of the English theater was a superhuman task. But now, sustained by a very odd sense of the author's plenary inspiration, he read with a devout eagerness which puzzled and rather intimidated Pomfret. However, he was still awake at the end of the first act.

"What do you think of it?" asked Brandon.

"Go on," was the curt rejoinder.

Sustained by this Olympian encouragement, Brandon passed to the second act.

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"Go on," was still the command.

With a puzzled attention, which he somehow yielded in spite of himself, Pomfret listened to the end of Act Four. And then the flushed, excited, triumphant reader asked his question again.

"It's certainly very unusual," said Mount Olympus cautiously.

Brandon somehow felt as if a bucket of cold water had been dashed over him. He had allowed himself to expect more sonorous epithets. Intoxicated by the play's magic, he suddenly took the bull by the horns. "I want you to put it up at your best theater in the next six months," he said.

"My dear boy," Pomfret gasped, "do you want to ruin me?"

"What's the objection?"

"Simply that it isn't a commercial proposition. Mind, I'm not saying a word against the play. You've got a wonderful head to have thought of it all, but as I say, it isn't a commercial proposition."

"It isn't my head that's thought of it, you old dunce," said Brandon. "Therefore I invite you to express yourself quite freely and frankly."

"Well, in the first place," said the great man, drawing at his cigar, "the subject itself is not suited to the theater."

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"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it. The whole thing is far too fantastic."

"Don't you think the central figure is a wonderful conception?"

"Yes, I do. But who do you suppose is going to play a god who works miracles, who is the genius of love and laughter, who heals the wounds of the world by converting it to a religion of universal brotherhood, universal fellowship, universal joy? Of course, in its way it's sublime, but the whole thing is full of peril."

"It has pitfalls, no doubt. But if only the players will have courage, I am convinced that the play will carry them."

"It would be a terrible risk. And then there's the Censor."

Brandon confessed that he had forgotten the Censor.

"He's very shy of religion as a rule," said Pomfret. "And he's very likely to object that it's far too gentle with the Boche. The creed of love your enemies is all very well in the Bible, but it's quite impossible to practice—at any rate just now. And then the parsons won't like their pitch being queered. Their stock in trade has always been gloom, reproach, damnation,

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mumbo jumbo, but your deity is a sort of Pied Piper, who converts a bleeding world to the love of God by the charm of his music, his power of sympathy, and his care for the doers of evil. Yes, it's a remarkable idea, but I'm afraid it's pro-Boche, and as far as the religious aspect goes, the people whom it might hope to interest are the most likely to take offense at it."

"I can't think they will," Brandon protested, "if it's given in the spirit in which it's conceived. Don't you see that it restates the central truths of Christianity, and presents them in a clearer, fuller, more universal light?"

"It may, but that is not likely to appeal to the big public, which goes to the play to be amused, and not to be edified."

"Why not let the two states be one and the same? Why not let them march together?"

"My boy, you don't know the theater."

"But the idea behind this play is that the theater is capable of becoming a great moral and spiritual force. And that's what it ought to be. It's appeal is irresistible; and religion brought from its superhuman pedestal might be humanized, individualized, made attractive to all the world. Now, my friend, produce this play at your best theater, with all the wonderful technical

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resource at your command, and you will have a success that will simply astonish you."

"Or failure that will cause me to file a petition in bankruptcy."

"I will indemnify you against all loss."

Pomfret shook a solemn head. "My dear boy," he said, "it would be madness to put up a play of this kind."

"Tell me, what would be the cost of a first-class production?"

"At the Imperial, five thousand pounds, and you would have to be prepared to lose every penny. It's not the kind of thing the public wants, particularly just now."

"Well, let them have their chance and see what happens."

They continued to discuss the matter until midnight, and even returned to it the following day. Brandon marshaled his arguments with such skill that Pomfret, against his deepest instinct as a theatrical manager, began to weaken a little. Like all men who succeed in life, the sense of his own limitations was ever before him. He knew that there were more things in earth and heaven than were dreamed of in the philosophy of Robert Pomfret. Brandon was a poet, a scholar, a man of taste, and even if his quali-

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ties had no place in a theater run on sound commercial lines, after all they stood for something. And when they had a solid backing of five thousand pounds, they became doubly impressive.

By the time Pomfret was at the end of his brief stay, he was thinking furiously. And if he saw no cause to alter the judgment he had formed, he was too shrewd a man not to fortify it with sound technical advice. Therefore, the next day, when he left Hart's Ghyll, the precious manuscript went with him. He promised to have it copied and submitted to his reader of plays.

XXXV

A FORTNIGHT passed, which for Brandon was a time of hope, increasing physical well-being, steadily returning faculty, and then came a letter from Pomfret. A second reading of the play had deepened his interest; moreover his reader, on whose judgment he relied, was inclined to think that it had possibilities. He agreed, however, that the subject was a thorny one in the present state of public feeling, and before any proposal was made it would be well, perhaps, to sound the Censor of plays.

A week later there came a second letter which severely dashed Brandon's hopes. The Lord Chamberlain was not prepared to license the play unless the chief character and two of the principal scenes were removed, in other words Hamlet must be played without the Prince of Denmark. "But," the letter added, "my reader and I are agreed that these 'cuts' will give the production as a whole a far better chance with the large public. The big scenes are full of danger and religion is not wanted in the theater. Therefore,

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if the author is willing for the cuts to be made, the play may be a practical proposition. The acting, the scenery, the mounting and the incidental music, which I am told is really first-rate, will then have less to interfere with them."

Brandon was rather dismayed. And he was in a trying position. Every week that passed added to his belief in the plenary inspiration of the work as a whole. His physical and mental power were growing day by day and the more firmly he became rooted in the living world of the present the greater his faith in the miracle which had made him so. To him, therefore, every word of the play was sacred. But in face of the official ukase there was only one thing to be done: he constrained himself to write to Wellwood, giving the history of the negotiations and inclosing Pomfret's letter.

He had not long to remain in doubt. In two days there came a reply. "Dear friend," it said, "the Masters of Wisdom in council assembled say to you, let none impair the Truce of God. It is or it is not. The Terms are the fruit of deep communing. The world must accept or reject them."

It was the kind of answer Brandon had looked for. Yet, while it simplified his difficulties, it also added to them. On the surface there was nothing more to be

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done, and the fact could be accepted with a clear conscience. But his faith being now as it was, and reinforced by his daily, his hourly experience, he felt his duty to the world at large bearing upon him more and more heavily.

Although the matter seemed to have reached its logical end, Brandon, somewhat to his wife's dismay, suddenly determined to go up to town. Even if there was nothing to hope for by still pursuing it, he would give himself the satisfaction of doing his utmost in the charge laid upon him.

Millicent did her best to keep him from London. His recovery had been so recent and so unforeseen that she could not help feeling that he was still on probation, and that undue stress, either of mind or body, would involve a serious relapse.

Dr. Joliffe, as puzzled as herself by the new turn of events, seconded her vigorously. He was sure, from the nature of the case, that his patient was still on very thin ice. But he was met now by a will of iron. Even if the heavens fell, Brandon had set his mind on going to town; yet he would not give a reason. The rueful Millicent had to order her trunks to be packed; moreover, she had to crave the shelter of the paternal roof in Hill Street for the peccant invalid until such time

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as he had done his business, whatever that business might be.

Prophesying every kind of evil for her stubborn lord, Millicent motored with him to town on a cold, wet morning of mid-January. Her mood was one of inspissated gloom, yet as she came to reflect, in the warmth and comfort of the car, on Gervase's state in relation to what it had been hardly more than a month ago, simple gratitude became the dominant emotion. She must never forget that several of the ablest doctors in the land had by that time given up his case as hopeless. It had been finally diagnosed as a nerve lesion whose baffling obscurity had proved too much even for modern therapeutic skill. A recovery was no longer hoped for, yet here was the sufferer sitting by her side in full possession of every physical and mental faculty. A miracle had happened beyond the ken of science, which it could only account for in the most general terms. A severe shock had stopped the clock in the first instance and medical science must now assume that a counter-shock had set it going again.

Even if Gervase was presuming on the abundant mercy of providence, it was hard for a devoted wife to be really angry with him just now. For one thing he was a gay and joyful Gervase. As one who has

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known the nadir of the soul, he was now a giant newly risen and refreshed with strong wine. The universe was rare and strange; the secret hope at the core of every human life had been verified in a way to surprise the expectations of the wildest dreamer.

The next morning he went to see Pomfret. As he set out for Half Moon Street the air was raw, the wind bitter, but he felt like an awakened sleeper walking in a new and wonderful world. Not again had he hoped to feel the London pavement under his feet; not again had he hoped to experience the thrill of the world's metropolis. Somehow its old, drab streets put an enchantment upon him. He was fired as he had never been by their magic and their mystery. And now he had a power within which set him so miraculously in tune with the infinite that he saw new colors in the gray sky, the dull grass, the bare trees; he heard noble harmonies in the flowing air and the sharp wind.

The great man, in a vivid chocolate breakfast suit, was dallying with a poached egg.

"By all the gods!" he cried, rising with outstretched hands. "What brings you to town, my son?"

"There is but one God," said Brandon, allowing himself to be pressed into the chair nearest the fire. "And John Smith is his prophet. In a word, he has brought me to town."

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Pomfret laughed, but the shrewd eyes twinkled with a heightened curiosity. "That is to say, your mysterious genius consents to the cuts?"

"On the contrary." And Brandon produced the letter.

While Pomfret read he watched his face narrowly. One thing was clear: since the great man's visit to Hart's Ghyll a good deal of water had flowed under the bridge. At any rate disappointment, vexation, perplexity, were now freely displayed in that expressive countenance.

"What a rum letter!" was the first comment. "Is the chap cracked or is he trying to pull your leg?"

"'Nothing is but thinking makes it so.'" Brandon's gravity was almost stern. "This is no common man, and one day, I hope, a topsy-turvy planet will know it."

"I can only say it's a great pity he won't consent to the cuts." The rejoinder was measured, deliberate, businesslike. "A very great pity. Morrison's read it, and he says if it is handled in the right way it might be a property. As it is of course the public won't look at it."

"They won't be allowed to look at it if the Censor's ukase means anything."

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"That can be got over. And as I say, the cuts will be all for the good of the play."

"But don't you see, old dunce, that this is a thing no one can touch?"

"In that case there's an end of the matter." Pomfret's jaw fell three inches. "The law won't allow it to be produced in London."

"Then so much the worse for London."

"No doubt," said the cynic at the breakfast table.

"But seriously, if you can persuade your crackpot to be practical we may have a pretty big thing. Honeybone, the composer, has seen the music. He says it's great, and he thinks that theme in the second act might go all over the world."

"Well, we shall see."

"But you won't, my friend, I assure you, unless you can make the man hear reason."

"We have his last word, I'm afraid," said Brandon gravely, as he put the letter back in his pocket. "And we musn't forget that there's a great purpose at the back of it all. I believe this work to be inspired, just as the gospels are inspired—although I own that a month ago I daren't have made any such statement."

Pomfret opened round eyes of wary amazement. "Well, well," he said. And he rose from the table and offered his visitor a cigarette.

XXXVI

WELL, well," said Robert Pomfret. At that moment he was a very puzzled man.

"So now you know the worst," said Brandon, looking at him eagerly. "And that's why in my humble opinion the thing must stand just as it is. Moreover, you now know why I conceive it my bounden duty to give it to the world. And if it can't be put up here I shall take it to New York."

The mention of New York had a visible effect upon Pomfret. "Rather a coincidence," he said. "Urban Meyer is over here. He's lunching with me today at the Ritz. You'd better come and meet him."

It was a grave confession of ignorance, but Brandon owned that the name of Urban Meyer conveyed nothing.

"He's the biggest thing of his kind in existence. He controls four hundred theaters in the United States, and about the same number in Europe."

"A sort of Haroun-al-Raschid," laughed Brandon.

"I've already mentioned the play to him. And he's reading it now. If you will come with me to the Ritz

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you may get further light on the matter. But if you're wise you won't be quite so frank with him as you've been with me. A little bird tells me that he's interested. But he's a regular Napoleon in business. Still you may like to hear what he has to say, and there's just a chance that he may save you a journey to New York."

"He may," said Brandon, "but I'm not hopeful. His name bewrayeth him."

"A hyphenated American," said Pomfret, "but he began life as a little Frankfort Jew. A remarkable man with a still more remarkable career behind him. Exact study of the public taste has made him a millionaire. Still, we're old friends and I'm bound to say I've always found him a very decent fellow. And if you care for human documents I think he will interest you."

In a fraternal manner they passed the time till one o'clock. About noon a wintry sun came out and they took a gentle turn in the Green Park to get an appetite for luncheon. The shrewdly humorous man of affairs was so full of advice that he was like a kindly uncle. "Whatever you do, my son, don't talk to Urban Meyer as you've talked to me," was the burden of his homily. Even now the practical Pomfret had not quite overcome a feeling of sheer amazement. A fantastic illu-

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sion had declared itself in a brilliant mind, and no matter how cautiously he approached the subject he felt the oppression of its shadow. Continuing his sage advice, he finally led his freakish friend through the revolving doors of the Ritz on the very stroke of one o'clock.

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XXXVII

IN the hall was an odd little man in a brown hat. Appearance marched with intellect in such a naïve way, that Urban Meyer had an unmistakable air of being the only one of his kind in existence. And this was fit and proper. There was only one Urban Meyer in the world, and nature had been at some pains to emphasize the fact for the benefit of all whom it might concern.

He was a singularly accessible little man, simple and modest, and not afflicted with "frills" or shyness. But the queer, birdlike eyes, while they smiled a gently diffused benevolence, missed no crumb of what passed around. He was delighted to meet Mr. Brandon—there was a curious habit of cutting up his words into syllables, the voice was soft and kind to the verge of the feminine, the handshake prompt and hearty and almost embarrassingly full of friendship. Altogether he was such a disarming little man on the surface, that it was hard to believe that any real depth of guile could be masked by such charm and innocence. But somehow the infallible Pomfret, in spite of his

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encomiums, had contrived to leave no doubt on the matter.

"'Beware the Jabberwock, my son,'" he whispered as they moved in the direction of luncheon.

The table was in the left-hand corner, out of the range of the curious, and as they sat down a feeling almost uncanny came upon Brandon that this was about to prove the most memorable meal of his life. Outwardly cool, he was so strangely excited that he had diligently to rehearse the precepts of his mentor.

"Let Old Uncle do the talking," had counseled the sage.

To begin with, however, Urban Meyer went off at a tangent. The keen eyes fixed themselves upon a distant table, and then he said, in a tone low and deep: "It may interest you to know that the world's biggest brain is in the room."

Brandon and Pomfret were duly impressed.

"Indeed," said Pomfret with becoming seriousness.

"You mean the man over there?" said Brandon following the eyes of Urban Meyer.

"Yes, the sallow one with a face like a Chicago ham."

"Where? Show me." Pomfret's curiosity was roused. Urban Meyer did not mistake geese for swans as a rule.

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"Straight ahead," said Brandon. "The long, lean, pale man. That's Murdwell the scientist--Gazelee Payne Murdwell who is giving his nights and days to making a worse hell of this planet than it is already."

"You know him?" said Urban Meyer.

"He's a neighbor of mine," Brandon explained. "Personally I like him, but he won't bear thinking about. He's all new and all true I suppose?" He had the air of one seeking for information.

"Sure." It was Urban Meyer's favorite word, but it seemed to do the work of many at this moment. "Murdwell's the problem for the near future. He's getting through to things that are best left alone. He's the writing on the wall. The best that can happen to the human race just now is for Murdwell to be closed down."

The tone had a curious authority. Somehow it made a deep impression on Brandon.

"That man's intellect is colossal. But he's on the wrong tack, and I tell him so, as I told Orville Wright when he first said that he was going to fly. The day the Wrights got home with their damned contraption was the worst the human race has seen since the invention of gunpowder; and now Gazelee Payne Murdwell comes along with a promise which it is humanity's business to see that he never fulfills."

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"But how prevent him?" asked Brandon. "In the present phase of human perversion, Gazelee Payne Murdwell is a prophet and a savior."

"At this moment," said Urban Meyer, "there's just one thing between the human race and Murdwell's Law, and that thing's God. And that's why I venture to hope that the Professor will have to close down. Two years ago I didn't believe in God, but since then I've changed my outlook." At this point he helped himself to an excellent mousse of ham, and the host ordered a bottle of Pommery. "Since then I've been down in the *Lusitania*, I've seen Paris saved for Europe, and I've still hopes of seeing civilization saved for mankind. I say this because I feel there's a God standing behind it and he's going to see it through. I was born at Frankfort in 1849, and I've bled for Prussia at Gravelotte." The little man drew up his shirt sleeve and showed a deep scar on his arm. "That's a Frenchman's saber. I was young then and I loved the fatherland. Even at that time Prussia was the enemy of the human race, but a boy couldn't be expected to know that and he couldn't have helped himself if he had. In 1876 I went to New York; in 1890 I became an American citizen; in 1916 I'm a citizen of the world.

"I consider that I have had exceptional facilities

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for seeing this war impartially, but my nature is to look to the future. I've always planned and built ahead. And as I figure it out Prussia is going to be downed and Germany bled white. But take it from me, my friends, it will be a very long and slow process." There was a slight pause in the little man's monologue, but no contradiction was offered.

"And in the end civilization will have to save Germany. Unless she gets a change of heart there's no security for the time ahead. At present she's outside the pale, but it won't be wise or right to let her remain there forever. She's a big proposition and the world owes her something. She will have to be helped to rid herself of Prussia. How's it to be done—that's the problem for the future. One thing is sure: you won't get her to cut herself free of her protector by ramming a pistol down her throat."

Brandon agreed.

"What's your alternative?" said Pomfret.

"We must keep the communications open as well as we can. It's the duty of those who look to the time ahead to try to get into touch with the German people."

"But that's quite impossible," said Pomfret. "They are a set of outlaws and perverts."

"I admit that the present plight of the German peo-

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ple is just about the biggest problem in all history."

"You're right. And every effort made by outsiders to help them will simply recoil on itself."

"It may be so. But if there is a God in the world he cares just as much for the Teuton as he cares for anyone else."

"Very true," said Brandon. "And Germany must be made to see the light. But that can only be done indirectly. The German, as the world is now beginning to realize, has a very curious psychology. He doesn't see through his eyes, but through his emotions. Therefore he calls for very special treatment."

"Why not let him alone?" said Pomfret. "Why not let him find his own level?"

"Because civilization can't afford to do that. It owes it to itself to help Germany."

"I fully agree," said Brandon.

"I entirely dissent," said Pomfret, filling the glasses of his guests. "Germany by her own considered acts has put herself outside the comity of nations, and there's no need to readmit her. She may lie down with the Magyar, the Turk and the Bulgar till the crack of doom. Civilization can do without Germany. The question is, can Germany do without civilization?"

"In spite of her errors and her crimes," said Urban

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Meyer, "you do an injustice to a great people if you close all the doors against her."

"We shall not agree about their greatness," said Pomfret. "They are a race of barbarians, with a dangerous streak of madness."

"That's one side of the Teuton, I admit. But on the other he's an idealist, a lover of the arts, an exemplary citizen. And the task of the future is to get him back to where he was. He's got to return to the old ways. By the bye, that play has set me thinking." Pomfret and Brandon exchanged glances, but Urban Meyer went on with a curious spontaneity, as if he were thinking aloud. "Yes, it has set my mind working. Last night I dreamed about it, and I believe if the Kingdom of Something Else could be presented just as I saw it in my dream it would speak to the real heart of Germany. It has the very spirit of her folk tales; it has the romance, the poetry, the music, the kindly people my childhood used to make and adore. And it teaches a gospel which might have a universal appeal. You know I've an immense belief in the theater. To me it's the true church of the time to come. And I don't see why the next world religion shouldn't begin with a great play."

Again Pomfret and Brandon exchanged glances.

"People ask what's wrong with Christianity. Its

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great flaw to my mind is that it asks too much; it is sublime but it isn't quite a working proposition. We won't go into a tremendous argument, but there isn't the slightest doubt that in its present form it doesn't touch the crowd. It needs simplifying, modifying, humanizing, before it can get right home to the man in the street. A lot of lumber and obsolete formulas will have to find their way to the scrap heap. The great truths can still be there, but the religion of the future has got to think more of this world and less of the next. And I'm by no means sure that the mind which conceived the idea of the Kingdom of the Something Else is not going to meet the deepest need of mankind at the present time."

Brandon shot a glance of triumph at Pomfret, but even in that moment of exaltation he remembered the counsel of the sage.

"At the first opportunity I should like to put up that play in New York at my biggest theater. There would be an all-star cast and a special orchestra, and in every detail it would be absolutely the greatest production ever seen in the States or anywhere else."

"And you would present it exactly as it is written?" said Pomfret in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yes. Not a line would be altered. It's not ordinary theater stuff. In this case it's the spirit of the

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thing that is going to matter and that must not be tampered with on any account."

Pomfret sat, a picture of whimsical incredulity, but Brandon, burning with the zeal of the evangelist, was now unequal to the change that the prudence of this world had laid upon him. Urban Meyer had been visited by the divine wisdom, and Brandon could not withhold acknowledgment of a fact so signal and so astonishing.

"The theater is my religion," the little man went on, and his queer eyes grew suddenly fixed as if they were looking at something. "I believe in it as I believe in nothing else. When you've watched millions of people going crazy over stunts like 'Baby's Bedsocks,' the original smile-with-a-tear-in-it, you ask yourself what could be done by a real play with a live message. As I say, the theater is the church of the future. There's no limit to its power; it speaks to the masses, cheers them, strengthens them, makes them healthy, lifts them up; it takes them into worlds beyond their own. And they understand its language.

"Now this play, as I see it, is a test case. It's not theater stuff of the ordinary brand and it's got to be played just as it is, in the spirit of reverence. It may fall down, and fall down badly, but I'd like to produce it as an act of faith, for the love I bear humanity."

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Pomfret could hardly believe his ears. Something had happened to the little man. He had known Urban Meyer nearly twenty years, and it was hard to relate this gush of altruism with the impresario whose astuteness was a byword all over the world. For one thing, and it amused Pomfret vastly, in the stress of his enthusiasm he had even forgotten to discuss the terms of the contract.

They came to that presently, and then a sight for the gods presented itself. With the aid of racial instincts ruthlessly applied, Urban Meyer had taken an immense fortune out of the theater, but now, entering it as a missionary, he was willing to make a contract which added greatly to Pomfret's perplexity.

"It's double what I've ever offered to a new man," said Urban Meyer, "but as I say, this production is going to be an act of faith. I believe in God, I believe in the theater, I believe in this play and that's the basis on which I invite the world to come in. If it falls down I may be out a hundred thousand dollars, but I shall not grudge a nickel, because no man can serve God and serve Mammon at the same time."

Moreover, to judge by a new glow in a quaintly Semitic countenance, Urban Meyer felt immensely strengthened by being in a position to make that assertion. He was not puffed up, but a light of enthusiasm

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played over his face which somehow made him better to look at. "Nothing is but thinking makes it so! To a man of imagination that means all that ever was and ever will be. And if you keep on expecting miracles to happen, miracles are bound to happen—if only you expect in the right way."

Pomfret could only smile perplexedly, but Brandon, flooded by a happiness rare and strange, was overborne by the workings of the divine providence. For a moment he was submerged by wild speculations, and then he awoke with a start to the fact that a sudden hand had been laid on his shoulder.

XXXVIII

HULLOA, Murd! You're looking cheap." Brandon awoke to the sound of the voice of Urban Meyer. En route from the luncheon table, Professor Murdwell had tarried to pass the time of day with a celebrated compatriot. A kind of freemasonry exists in all lands among the supereminent, and these two shining examples knew how to pay the tacit homage due to conspicuous merit.

"Not well, Murd?" The all-seeing eye of Urban Meyer was fixed like a bead on the scientist.

"Nothing, my boy," was the light answer. "A bit run down, that's all. As a fact I'm off now to see my doctor. I can soon be put right. How are you, my friend?" The kindly pressure increased on Brandon's shoulder. "It's very good to see you on your feet again. I heard the other day from old Parson What's-his-name that you had managed to find a cure, although I'm bound to say that when I saw you last, back in the fall, I'd about given you up. However—I'm more than glad—I'm simply delighted." And with the benign air of the *bon enfant*, Professor

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Murdwell followed in the wake of Bud and Jooly, who had gone into the hall.

"He mayn't know it," said Urban Meyer in a low voice, "but that man's got death in his face."

Brandon was startled by the tone. It had an uncanny prescience which made him feel uncomfortable.

"If looks mean anything his number's up. Personally he's a good fellow—one of the best alive—but he's been touching things which up till now were *verboten*. Let us pray to God they always will be."

How do you know all this?—was the question which rose to the tip of Brandon's tongue. But he refrained from asking it. Murdwell's face had a curious ashen hue, and now that its meaning had been pointed out it was not to be mistaken. As for the second part of the statement, made with equal authority, it gave an impression of curious insight into certain phenomena, which it would be futile to discuss.

In the hall, over coffee and cigars, the talk went on. Brandon felt himself living in a kind of wonderland of which Urban Meyer was king. The little man's words flowed on in soft, odd, detached syllables, yet they were alive with a magic interest for one who shared his faith. As for Pomfret, tasting deliberately a masterpiece among cigars, he had to admit in the recesses of an almost uncomfortably sagacious mind,

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that never in the whole course of its owner's experience had it been so completely at a loss.

It was impossible to recognize the Urban Meyer of commerce. And to find one of the strongest brains of the age thrown off its balance by a mere stage play, the stuff in which it was always trafficking, was simply ludicrous. In the case of Brandon it was less surprising. For one thing he had hardly recovered from a terrible illness; and again he came to the theater a raw amateur. But Urban Meyer! Yes, it was quite true that the day of miracles was not yet past!

By the time they had said good-by to the little man and had sauntered round the corner into Saint James's Street as far as Brandon's club, Pomfret's amazement had grown quite disconcerting.

"I fancy when Old Uncle jumped from the *Lusitania* it shook him up a bit," he said in a feeble attempt at self-protection. "He *can't* be the man he was."

"Because he sees the plenary inspiration in the Kingdom of the Something Else?"

"To think of that old hard-shell turning the theater into a church! Ye gods! It's the most ironical thing I ever heard. Still, he can afford himself little luxuries of that kind. He's making his soul no doubt."

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"At any rate," said Brandon, "he'll deserve well of heaven if he can reform the Boche."

Before Pomfret could make suitable reply they walked into the arms of George Speke, who was augustly descending the steps of the stronghold of the Whigs.

"What!" he cried. "You!" His eyes raked Brandon from top to toe. "I can't believe it. And one hears people say that miracles don't happen."

"I plead guilty to being among them," said Pomfret; in the presence of Speke's amazement he had a sense of intellectual relief.

"Science won't acknowledge it as a miracle," said Brandon. "It has a theory which fully covers the case. It was explained to me last night by Bowood, the nerve man. I forget what he called it—but what the thing amounts to is that functional reaction has been induced by counter-shock—excuse the phraseology—but Bowood says the thing is constantly occurring."

"I affirm it as a miracle," said Speke.

"I, too," said Brandon. "More has happened in my case than therapeutics can explain. I've been given a new soul as well as a new body. But we won't go into that now. At this particular moment I

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want to talk to you about that fantastically absurd official, the Censor of Stage Plays."

But the subject was deferred until the following evening when the two men dined together. Even then George Speke was not very illuminating. After all, the censorship of stage plays was a departmental matter, and this habitual member of governments had the departmental mind. A harmless functionary had been much attacked in the public press by the kind of people who attack every kind of institution, but experience had proved him to be at once wise, necessary, and convenient.

"Wise! Necessary! Convenient!" said Brande, "to invest a single individual of cynical mediocrity with absolute power? It's an insult to every pen in the realm."

Speke laughed at the vehemence but admitted the truth. Yet a threadbare controversy left him cold. To be quite candid, the theater was negligible, the art of dramatic writing equally so. Far better that both should perish than that either should sully the mind of the humblest citizen of Imperial Rome.

XXXIX

IN the course of the next few days Brandon interviewed various specialists, and then by their advice he went to Brighton for two months. The result was such a steady gain in physical force and mental equilibrium that he was able to resume his military duties.

Not by his own request was he spared the boredom, the misery, the ghoulish horror of the trenches. The higher expediency was able to realize that men of Brandon's age, particularly if they have once been badly knocked out, don't pay for cartage to France. Therefore he was given a commission and sent to the north to train new units.

He didn't complain. Whatever his job, he would have taken off his coat and set to. He was no subscriber to the military fetish, nothing would ever make him one, but in August, 1914, he had given his services unconditionally to his country and he was not the man to shirk the obligation into which he had entered.

To one of subtle perceptions and fastidious cul-

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ture, the teaching of a lot of "bandy-legged coal-shovelers" to form fours, and to hurl an imaginary bomb at an imaginary Hun should have been a wearisome, soul-destroying affair. Yet somehow it was not. There was a time when in spite of his honest, democratic liberalism, he would have been tried beyond endurance by the fantastic boredom of it all. But that time had passed. Never again could the human factor, however primitive, be without its meaning. He had been wrought upon by a miracle, and it abided with him during every hour of the new life.

His thoughts were often with John Smith. Enshrined in Brandon's heart as a divine symbol, he was the key to a Mystery which had the power to cleanse even the thing called war of its bestial obscenity. Many a night when he came back dog-tired and heart-sore, to a dirty, comfortless room and an ill-cooked meal in a rude, miserable colliery township whose like he had never seen, he was sustained by the sublime faith of one who, for the sake of the love he bore his kind, had dared to transcend reason in order to affirm it.

Many a night in the fetid air of a bedroom whose window could not be persuaded to open, he lay on a broken-backed mattress trying to relate this divine friend with the humanity through whose travail he

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had found expression. Who and what was this portent? Was he akin to the August Founder of Christianity? Was he a madman hugging a crazy but pathetic and terrible delusion? Or was he the superman of which the World Spirit had long been dreaming, a great clairvoyant able to summon representative souls from the astral plane?

It must be left to the future to decide. At the best these were fantastic speculations, but they were now the *clow* of a forward-looking soul. Only these could sustain it in the path of duty. Week by week, it was being borne in upon Brandon that the sword could never hope to achieve anything worth achieving. Humanity was too complex and it was poisoned at the roots. Prussia after all was only a question of degree. Unless a change took place in the heart of man, these splendid, simple chaps with their debased forms of speech, their crudeness and their ignorance, would hurl their bombs in vain.

How he loved these bandy-legged warriors who never opened their mouths without defiling his ears. Deeper even than the spirit of race was the sense of human brotherhood. It resolved every difficulty, it unlocked every door. And the key had come to him by means of the inmate of Wellwood who had re-

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ceived it in turn from the divine mystic of the hills of Galilee.

The weeks went by in their weariness, yet nothing happened to the world. Months ago Urban Meyer had returned to America and the play had gone with him. The shrewd Pomfret had been made an agent for the author, in order to protect the interests of John Smith, but he received no word from New York beyond an intimation that the play had been mysteriously "hung up." The news was not unexpected, yet he never doubted that sooner or later Urban Meyer would carry out his fixed intention of producing it.

In the meantime, Brandon wrote several letters to the inmate of Wellwood. The new turn of events was revealed, and great stress laid upon the supreme good fortune which so far had attended the play. To have convinced such a man as Urban Meyer of its almost plenary inspiration meant that its destiny was on the way to fulfillment.

The letters Brandon received in answer must have puzzled him greatly, had they not squared so exactly with the theory he had formed. Full as they were of warm and deep feeling, they yet seemed remote from the conditions of practical life. Even their note of sure faith was open to misinterpretation. There was no recognition of the singular providence which had

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set Urban Meyer on the track of the play, or if there was, it took for granted that the little man was the chosen instrument of God. Like Brandon himself, he was only a medium, through which Heaven was to resolve a high and awful issue.

Brandon received no second command to Wellwood, and he had not the courage to make pilgrimage without it. But as the long months passed and he grew more secure in physical power, the impression of the dreamlike December journey remained ineffaceably vivid. Time strengthened a fervent belief in the sublime genius of John Smith, but the wild speculations to which that belief gave rise led to one inescapable conclusion which in the last resort he could not quite find the courage to embrace openly. The disciple was thrilled by the tone of each letter he received, but nineteen centuries had passed since the Master had walked among men; and Brandon, with his own work in the world yet to do, could only feel that Faith itself besought him not to go too far beyond the poor, limited, human ken.

In order to fulfill the common daily round, he felt bound to hold aloof from John Smith, yet the man himself was never out of his thoughts. And not for a moment did he forget a sacred task. Months went by, the brief occasional letters ceased, and then Bran-

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don sent an emissary to Wellwood, so that he might gain first-hand knowledge without incurring the terrible risk his every instinct warned him must attend a personal visit.

Mr. Perry-Hennington was the chosen vehicle. Between the two men there had been a reconciliation. The return of health had enabled Brandon to shed much of his animosity; besides, he saw that if John Smith's view of his mission was the true one, such a man as the vicar of Penfold could hardly be more than a humble catspaw of destiny. That good, but narrow and obtuse man, was perhaps only the unconscious means by which a second world-drama was to unfold itself.

In the autumn Brandon was granted a few days' leave. After weary months of servitude in the arid north, a week at Hart's Ghyll, among his own people, was like a breath of heaven. And it synchronized with a tide of greater events.

These began with a morning call from the vicar. A very different Gervase Brandon received him now in that glorious room, which, however, for them both, must always hold memories of anxious and embittered conflict. The squire of Hart's Ghyll had emerged from the long night of the soul, and even to this closed mind he was far more than the Gervase Bran-

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don of old. In returning to that physical world which he loved so well, he had gained enlargement. Something had been added to a noble liberality; a softness, an immanence of the spirit, which Mr. Perry-Hennington was quick to ascribe to his favorite process of purification by suffering.

The vicar was pleased by the warmth of his reception; and he had already had a sign of Brandon's change of attitude. The previous day, at Brandon's request, he had paid a visit to Wellwood. And in that request, Mr. Perry-Hennington saw a tacit admission of the justice of his actions; he also saw that Brandon, now clothed in his right mind, was fully alive to his own errors in the past.

"Well, my dear Gervase," he said with full-toned heartiness, the underside of which was magnanimity, "yesterday, as you suggested, I went to Wellwood to see our friend."

"More than good of you," said Brandon, his eyes lighted by gratitude and eagerness. "An act of real charity. I could have gone myself, of course, but I don't quite trust myself in the matter—that is to say—"

"Quite so—I understand and appreciate that. And I am particularly glad you left it to me to form my own impressions."

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"Well?"

"In the first place, I had a long talk with Dr. Thorp, who by the way is a singularly experienced and broad-minded man."

"I fully agree."

"Well, I'm bound to say that he grew quite enthusiastic over the poor dear fellow. In every way he is a most exemplary patient; indeed, I was told that he wields a truly remarkable moral influence over the whole establishment, inmates and nursing staff alike."

"I learned that many months ago."

"It is very surprising that it should be so." The vicar's air was one of perplexity. "But Dr. Thorp considers John Smith an extraordinary case."

"So I have gathered."

"He suffers, of course, from an obscure form of religious mania, which fully justifies his detention, but at the same time he leads the life of a saint."

"How is his health?"

A cloud came on the vicar's face. He did not answer the question at once. At last he said: "Let me prepare you for bad news. I regret to say that he is slowly dying."

Brandon caught his breath sharply. He did not try to conceal his distress. He put a dozen eager

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questions. The announcement had come as a great blow.

"Dr. Thorp holds out no hope that his life will be a long one," said the vicar. "Apart from the ravages of his disease, the spirit appears to be wearing out the body. He doesn't take enough nourishment. He simply can't be induced to touch flesh meat in any form; in fact for many weeks he has been existing almost entirely on bread and water."

"He does not wish to live?"

"I think he longs for the other and the better world."

"That, at any rate, is perhaps not altogether surprising."

The thrust might not have been intentional, but the shadow deepened on the vicar's face. "It is not," he said. "Yet he is so well cared for, he is allowed such liberty, his relations with all the other inmates are so charmingly harmonious, that it is hard to see how the freedom of the outer world could add to his present happiness; that, at any rate, is Dr. Thorp's view. His troubles, odd as it may seem, do not spring from his immediate surroundings; they spring from the present state of the world. His mania has crystallized into a strange form. He has become pathetically convinced

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that he is the Savior, and he spends his whole time in fasting and prayer."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes." The vicar paused an instant, and in that instant Brandon literally devoured the subtly changing face of the man before him. "Not only did I see him, I was permitted to speak to him. Moreover, he sent you a message. You are always to remember that one unconverted believer may save the whole world." As the vicar repeated the odd phrase, his eye met Brandon's and a silence followed.

"I shall never forget the way he said it," Mr. Perry-Hennington went on. "The tone of his voice, the look of his eyes gave one quite an uncanny feeling. Whether it was the mental and physical state of the poor man himself, or whether it was his surroundings, I cannot say, but somehow I can't get the picture of him as he spoke those words out of my mind. It's weak, I know, but the whole of last night I lay awake thinking of Wellwood, and this poor dear fellow, John Smith."

"Was he so different from what you expected to find him?"

"Somehow he was. His disease has taken such a curious form. And in that strange place, in the midst of a lot of old men, afflicted like himself with various

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fantastic delusions, he has an air of authority which is really most striking—I am bound to say is really most striking."

"I cannot tell you how interested I am to hear you say that," was Brandon's eager rejoinder.

"If one had not continually said to oneself: 'This gloomy place, haunted with dead souls, is Wellwood Asylum,' one might even have come under a strange spell. Dr. Thorp says the freakish power of some of these broken-down intellects is amazing; and to see them seated around that large and somber room engaged in what John Smith calls 'the correlation of human experience,' is at once the most tragic and the most pathetic sight I have ever witnessed."

"It is a sight that I, at any rate, shall take to my grave." As Brandon saw again the picture by the inward eye, he was shaken by a wild tremor. "Henceforth, I shall see it always in this life, and I look to see it in the next."

"Yes," said the vicar. "I can well understand your feeling about it."

Brandon gave a little shudder; and then, after a silence he said: "May I ask what impression you formed of our poor friend?"

"It is most difficult to put it into words. Physically and mentally he has undergone a very curious change;

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and he appears to wield a strange power over all with whom he comes in contact. As I say, I felt it myself. I shall never forget the shock I had when those eyes emerged from that bearded face. For a moment one could have almost believed oneself in the presence of Someone Else. Then I remembered where I was, but it needed an effort I assure you."

"Do you still feel that Wellwood is the place for him?"

"Yes, I do. I discussed the matter with Dr. Thorp, and he is strongly of the opinion that the poor fellow is better off at Wellwood than he would be elsewhere. They have come to love him there. He is extremely well cared for, he never complains of the loss of personal liberty, and, as I say, there is every reason to think that his days are numbered."

"Dr. Thorp has no doubt on that point?"

"None. The poor fellow is failing physically. At the present time he appears to live more in another world than he does in this. One does not pretend to know what that other world is or may be. Apparently it is a kind of mystical dreamland, in which he persuades himself that he communicates with departed spirits. And there are times when he enters a soul condition which lies outside Dr. Thorp's own experience of psychical phenomena. In fact, he considers

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John Smith to be by far the most baffling and complex case with which he has ever had to deal."

A number of other questions Brandon put to the vicar, in the hope of light from an authentic source upon a very remarkable matter. For himself he could only account for it by means of a far-fetched hypothesis, with which he knew that Mr. Perry-Hennington was the last man in the world likely to agree. All the same, one clear fact emerged from this conversation. There was a change in the vicar. Could it be that, since his recent visit to Wellwood, Mr. Perry-Hennington had begun to realize that there might be more things in earth and heaven than his philosophy had dreamed of hitherto?

AFTER luncheon that same day, the salutary process now at work in the vicar's mind received a further stimulus. He was to find himself involved in a matter at once painful and unexpected, and the impression left upon him was deeply perplexing.

At the urgent request of Professor Murdwell, who had just returned from New York, he had promised to go to Longwood that afternoon. Mr. Murdwell had been out of the country six months, and now that he had got back, almost his first act had been to send for the vicar.

As Mr. Perry-Hennington made stately progress on an antiquated tricycle along the leafy carpet of the wind-bitten autumn lanes, he was far from anticipating the sad surprise that was in store. In the spring, when last at Longwood, he had been struck by the fact that his neighbor was not looking particularly well, and he had ventured to remark upon it. Mr. Murdwell had made light of the matter. But this afternoon, as soon as the vicar had been ushered into the cozy

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room in which the scientist sat alone, he received a shock. A great change had taken place in a few months. The alert, far-looking eyes had lost their luster, the cheeks had fallen in, the face of keenness and power was terribly ravaged by disease.

Mr. Murdwell rose with the old air of courtesy to receive his visitor, but the effort was slow and painful.

"Good of you to come, sir," he said, motioning his visitor to a chair, and then half collapsing into his own. He looked at the vicar with a rather forlorn smile. "I'm a very sick man these days," he said.

The vicar was a little distressed by the air of complete helplessness. "I hope it's nothing serious," he said.

"I've come home to die," said Mr. Murdwell, with the calmness of a stoic.

The words were a shock to the vicar.

"The word 'home' mustn't surprise you. I come of clean-run stock; I belong to the old faith and the old blood. As the world goes just now, I feel that I am among my own people, and I want you to lay me yonder in your little churchyard on a good Sussex hillside."

Mr. Perry-Hennington felt a growing dismay. "I venture to hope," he said, "that you will be spared to us a long time yet."

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"A week or so at the most." Infinite weariness was in the voice. "You are a good and sensible man, and I am going to talk to you frankly. The thought of leaving my wife and girl hurts like a knife; and of course my work means a very great deal to me. I have simply lived in it; indeed the truth is, I have lived in it too much. And it is now being brought home to me that it is for the ultimate good of humanity that it should remain unfinished.

The vicar, grieved and amazed, was unable to say anything. He had quite a regard for this man of original and powerful mind, and it shocked him deeply to find him in his present state.

"It seems that at present there are certain things which are still forbidden to science. A year ago I was fully convinced that such was not the case. But that view was premature. At that time the whole question raised by Murdwell's Law was still *sub judice*. The verdict has now been given. I have a cancer, which must kill me long before I am able to complete my researches. And I think you, sir, and all who see the cosmos at your particular angle are fully entitled to regard this as the act of God."

The vicar remained silent, but with an intense and painful interest he followed the revelations of the dying man.

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"Thus far shalt thou go and no farther! The power, or the group of powers, which controls the development of mankind, whispered those words to me a year ago. But I chose to disregard them. I was too deeply committed to my studies, which, had I been allowed to pursue them to their logical conclusion, would have revolutionized war and everything else on this planet. There is no need to make a secret of the fact that, by the operation of Murdwell's Law, I have been able to trace the existence of an element hitherto unknown. It has been given the name of vitalium, and my hope, and the hope of the distinguished men of science associated with me, was that its bearing on present events would be decisive. I still hold the theory that this element contains powers and properties compared with which all others in the purview of man are insignificant. For instance, I said that it was within the competence of vitalium to destroy an enemy fleet at a distance of twenty thousand miles. But as I was warned at the time the prophecy was made, and as I know beyond all question now, I am not to be allowed to prove my proposition.

"Prometheus is not to be allowed to steal the fire from heaven. And well it is for mankind that some things are still forbidden to it. Whether that will always be the case I dare not prophesy. But at this

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moment I have no doubt that Gazelee Payne Murdwell is the writing on the wall for the human race. Put that on my tombstone in your Sussex churchyard."

The vicar was strangely moved.

"Another theory I have formed, which I am not to be allowed to prove, is that with the aid of vitalium it is possible to communicate with other planets. There is little doubt that some of them do communicate with one another, and I am inclined to think that the terrible crisis the world is now passing through is a reaction to events in other places. Man is only at the threshold of the knowable. He is surrounded by many forces of which he knows little or nothing. Some of these are inimical. The future has terrible problems for the human race, and well it is that it cannot foresee them.

"As for this terrible struggle, in which I am proud to think my two boys are bearing a part, the end is not yet in sight. The resources of the enemy exceed all computation, and we don't know what forces hostile to man stand behind them."

"It may be so, Mr. Murdwell." The vicar, greatly wrought upon, spoke in a voice of deep emotion. "We are in the hands of God. And I am convinced that

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He is fighting for us, and therefore in the end our cause must prevail."

The man of science smiled wanly. "I cannot form a conception of God in terms of atomic energy. And yet I feel with you, as I have always felt, that there is a Friend behind phenomena. And I am inclined to believe, now that we have a mass of evidence to guide us, that the first phase of this war proved that very clearly. The victory of the Marne was a signal manifestation. By all the rules of the game, at the moment the enemy of mankind fell on Europe in her sleep, France was irretrievably lost, and civilization with her. But something happened which was not in the textbooks. And in the perpetual recurrence of that Something lies the one hope for the human race."

"Well, Mr. Murdwell"—the vicar spoke very earnestly—"as a humble servant and minister of God, I can only say that I share your belief. Whatever may happen to us, I feel that the human race could not have got as far as it has, unless a special providence had always stood behind it. My faith is, that this providence will not be withdrawn in the world's darkest hour."

"I venture to think that you are right," said the dying man. "But as I say, do not ever forget that

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Gazelee Payne Murdwell is the writing on the wall for the human race."

This talk with Mr. Murdwell made a deep impression on the vicar. Unable by nature or mental habit to accept all the premises of an abnormal thinker, it was beginning to strike Mr. Perry-Hennington with new and rather bewildering force, that truth has many aspects. At Wellwood the previous day he had felt a vague distrust of his own perceptions. Things were not quite as they seemed. Even poor, deranged John Smith could not be dismissed by a simple formula. It had suddenly dawned on a closed mind that a door was opening on the unknown. Somehow the relation of John Smith to many dimly understood phenomena could not be bridged by a phrase. And a feeling of imperfect knowledge was intensified by contact with this other remarkable personality. One must be read in the light of the other. Murdwell was the antithesis, the negation of John Smith. And the nature of things being as it was, each must have his own meaning, his own message to be related to the sum of human experience.

XLI

DISTRESSED by the interview with his neighbor, the vicar took the first chance of going to Hart's Ghyll with the sad news. He had a craving to unburden his mind. And Brandon, with whom he was now on terms of complete amity, was the one person likely to share an almost painful interest in Murdwell's Law and its discoverer.

Brandon, indeed, was only too ready to discuss the matter. The tenant of Longwood had loomed large in his thoughts from the hour in which he had first had the privilege of knowing him. To the mind of a Gervase Brandon, he was a portent, a phenomenon; in sober truth "the writing on the wall for the human race." But the vicar's news caused Brandon less concern than might have been the case had he not been able in a measure to anticipate and therefore to discount it. He recalled his last glimpse of Professor Murdwell in London, and the prophetic words of Urban Meyer.

"A terrible nemesis," said the vicar. "A great tragedy."

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"An intervention of a merciful providence," was Brandon's rejoinder.

"No doubt—if his theories are rooted in scientific fact. To me, I confess, they seem wholly fantastic. They suggest megalomania. How does Murdwell's Law stand scientifically?"

"It is accepted by the mathematician, and is said to provide a key to certain unknown forces in the physical world. It has given rise to an immense amount of speculation, and for some little time past very remarkable developments have been predicted."

"Which may not now materialize?"

"Let us hope not. Murdwell himself is another Newton, but his Law opens the door to sheer diabolism on a cosmic scale. May its terrible secrets perish with him!—that's the best the poor race of humans has to hope for."

The vicar fully agreed. "Researches of this kind are surely the negation of God," he said.

"I think with you. But heads vastly better than mine think otherwise. Good and evil are interchangeable terms in our modern world of T. N. T. and the U-boat."

"That I shall never believe. Black is black, white is white." It was the fighting tone, yet there was somehow a difference.

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"I shall not contradict you," said Brandon, with a smile, which had none of the old antagonism. "For one thing, the spectrum has shifted its angle since last we discussed the subject. I see you, my dear friend, and the views you hold, in a new light. But apart from that I am simply burning to talk about something else. I think I once told you that John Smith had written a play."

"A play, was it?" Almost in spite of himself, there came an odd constraint to the vicar's tone. "I was under the impression that it was a poem."

"There was a poem. But there was also a play, which I think I once mentioned."

"You may have." Constraint was still there. "But whichever it is—does it really matter? Poor dear fellow!"

"Yes, it matters intensely." The sudden gleam of excitement took the vicar by surprise. "The news has just reached me that the play has been produced in New York."

Mr. Perry-Hennington agreed that the fact was remarkable, but far less so than its production in London would have been. After all, the Americans were a very curious people.

"But it starts with every augury of world-wide success."

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"Isn't that the American way? Mustn't they always be licking creation over there?"

Brandon was inclined to admit the indictment. "But," said he, "they generally have a solid basis of fact to work on before they start doing that. And in this case they appear to have found it. The man who has dared to produce this play is convinced that it will prove a landmark in the history of the drama at any rate."

"Really!" The vicar pursed cautious, half-incredulous lips. "But I'm afraid the theater conveys nothing to me—the modern theater, that is. Of course I've read Shakespeare and the Greek tragedies, and I once saw Irving in Hamlet—very impressive he was—but to me the theater in general is so much Volapuk."

"Still," persisted Brandon, "I hope you will allow it to be truly remarkable that a people so sagacious, who in works of creative imagination are better judges than ourselves, should be carried off their feet by the dramatic genius of our local village idiot."

An ever-increasing perception of the situation's irony lured Brandon to a little intellectual byplay. Perhaps to have resisted it would have been more than human. And as he had staked all upon the transcendent powers of his friend, and an impartial court had now declared in his favor, this moment of

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self-vindication came to him as the most delicious of his life.

Somehow it did him good to watch a cloud gather slowly over the vicar's craggily unexpressive face. An abyss was opening in Mr. Perry-Hennington's mental life. Things were happening which threatened to undermine his moral and intellectual values. Brandon could almost have pitied him. And yet it was hardly possible to pity the vicar's particular brand of arrogance, or, in this case, to forget the crime it had wrought.

"Urban Meyer," Brandon went on in his quiet voice, "is the world's foremost theatrical manager. And he writes to say that, were his theater six times its present size, it could not accommodate the crowds which flock to it daily."

"Really!" said the vicar. "A very curious people, the Americans."

"As you say, a very curious people. And this abnormally shrewd and far-sighted little German Jew has already arranged for the play's production at Stockholm, Christiania, and also at the Hague."

"Some kind of propaganda, I presume." There was a sudden stiffening of the vicar's tone.

"It may be so. The aim of the play is to heal the wounds of the world, so I suppose it is a kind of

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propaganda. But it may interest you to know that Christiansen, the great Scandinavian poet and dramatist, has already prepared a version for the Stockholm state theater, that Hjalmar is doing the same for Denmark, Van Roon for Holland, and that it has been banned in London."

"Ah!" said Mr. Perry-Hennington. And then with a show of fight which amused Brandon, he added, "Wisely, no doubt."

"In other words, the Censor of Stage Plays has completely justified his existence."

"I'm afraid I can't offer an opinion on that point," said the vicar, slowly renewing his dignity.

"Only the pen of a Swift or a Voltaire could do justice to that sublime individual. Here we have a country whose proud boast is that it alone among European states is really free, which is sacrificing its young men by the million in order to overthrow Prussianism, imposing such fetters upon intellectual liberty that one can only gasp."

"Rightly no doubt." Of late deadly blows had been aimed at the vicar's mental security, but there was still a kick in the old Adam. "In intellectual matters absolute freedom becomes anarchy, and that would be intolerable, even in a democratic country. The state is bound to devise a means of holding it in

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check. Of this play I know nothing, nor am I competent to speak of plays in general, but prima facie the government is fully justified in suppressing it. No good thing can come out of Babylon."

"Or in other words out of Wellwood Asylum."

"One does not go quite so far as to say that," said the vicar thoughtfully.

"An interesting admission!"

"Which perhaps one oughtn't to make," said the vicar rather uneasily. And then, as if a little shocked by his own boldness, he hastened to quit such perilous ground. "To return to stage plays. Things of that kind will not help us to win the war."

"And yet the pen is mightier than the sword."

"That is a dark saying I have never been able to understand. We live not by words but by deeds, and never more so than in this stern time."

"A play may be a great deed."

"If it be sufficiently inspired. But there is much virtue in an 'if.'"

Brandon did not continue the argument. Feeling the ground on which he stood to be impregnable, he could well afford not to do so. Besides it was scarcely the act of a friend to press the vicar too hard in the present amazing circumstances. He was no longer intrenched in self-security. If certain odd changes

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of manner meant anything, the walls of his little world were falling in, and a perplexed and bewildered Thomas Perry-Hennington was now visible amid the ruins.

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XLII

THE very remarkable news from New York gave Brandon, for the rest of his brief stay at Hart's Ghyll, a feeling of almost perilous exhilaration. Since his recovery, less than a year ago, his whole life had been a subtle embodiment of the miraculous. And the letter from Urban Meyer had intensified the sense of the miraculous to such a degree, that at first it hardly seemed possible to meet the bald facts of the case in its new aspect and remain perfectly rational. For more years than Brandon cared to count, he had held the cold faith that miracles do not occur; it had now been proved to him, beyond a doubt, that miracles do occur, and he had to face the truth squarely, and yet continue in the work of the world.

To make his task the more difficult, he could not help feeling that his present job was one for which he was ill-qualified; certainly it was not the one he would have chosen. Somehow it filled him with a deep repugnance to train others in the art of killing, even in the art of killing the Hun; but it was not for him to decide where such powers as he had could be

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of most use to the state. He did not quarrel with the edict which declared him unfit for the trenches, but there were times when he would almost have preferred their particularly foul brand of boredom to the dismal routine of acquiring a parade voice, and the grind of rubbing up his mathematics, a branch of knowledge in which he had never shone.

It came to him, therefore, with a sense of grateful relief, when one day, about a week after he had returned to his unit, a letter reached him of an informal friendliness, yet written on government paper. It said:

*Whitehall,
December 2.*

MY DEAR BRANDON:

If a square peg can be persuaded to forsake a round hole, some of us here feel that the country might make a more profitable use of your services, that is to say, there is an opportunity to give your highly specialized qualities freer play. A ministry of Social Reconstruction is being formed, to deal mainly with post-war problems—it is not quite our English way to take time by the forelock in this audacious fashion, but some of our Colonial friends are teaching us a thing or two—and last night in conversation with Prowse and Mortimer among others, your name came up. We agreed that your particular light is not one to hide under a bushel of coal. One shudders to think of the number of tricks of the kind that have been played already, but at last we are beginning to realize that the country can't afford it. So if you will

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consent to work under Prowse, with or without payment, I think the War Office can be persuaded to spare you for a larger sphere of usefulness.

Yours ever,

GEORGE SPEKE.

In the depths of his boredom Brandon could have kissed the letter, and have wept for joy. The tact of an expert handler of men, who well understood the bundle of quixotisms with whom he had to deal, had played the tempter's part with rare success. A letter of that kind left no doubt that the country was about to gain enormously by depleting the Tynesi de Terriers of a morbidly conscientious subaltern, while at the same time enriching a government department with a real live ex-fellow of Gamaliel.

It was not until early in the new year, however, that Brandon was transferred to a wooden structure in Saint James's Park, the headquarters of the newly-created department. He was almost ashamed to find how much more congenial was the work he had now to do. To the really constructive mind, there is something repellent in the naïve formulas, and the crude paraphernalia of mere destruction. Here in the new "billet" was scope for a rather special order of brain. He was able to look forward to a future in which a new England would arise. There were already por-

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tents in the sky, portents which told him that the world of the future was going to be a very different place from the world of the past. Much depended on whether the grim specter of war could be laid with reasonable finality for a long time to come, but from the day in which he took up his new labors he did not doubt that, whatever the final fate of Prussia, the issue of Armageddon itself would be a nobler, a broader spirit in the old land which he loved so dearly, and a freer, humaner world for every race that had to live in it.

His position in the Social Reconstruction Bureau was one of importance. Long before the war, even before he came into the Hart's Ghyll property, it had been his ambition to make the world a rather better place for other people to inhabit. And the opportunities which came to him now gave rare scope to a reawakened energy. A marvelous field had been offered to this protagonist of works and faith.

In spite of the last terrible clinch in which the new world as well as the old was now involved, these were great days for Brandon. His powers burgeoned nobly in the service of that nation which had now definitely emerged, in spite of all her limitations and her legacies from the past, as the banner bearer of civilization.

Deep in his heart lay the faith that through blood

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and tears the whole race of men would be born again. And month by month that faith grew, even amid the final stupendous phase when the specter of famine stalked through the land. Moreover, he had a sense of personal election. A promise had been made to him, and through him, to his fellows. "One unconverted believer" was now the living witness that all the old prophecies were true.

Every living thing in the world around him, of which a supernal Being was the center, had a new meaning, a new force, a new divinity. Unsuspected powers were now his; latent faculties allowed him to live more abundantly. He looked up where once a skeptic's eye had looked down, and the difference was that between a life in the full glory of light and sorry groping in darkness.

The news always reaching him of the growth of the miracle was now the motive power of a great belief, yet to one able to trace it from the germ it hardly seemed credible or at the best too good to be true. From many sources there came tidings of the new force at work in the world. The play was making history; wherever it appeared, reverberations followed. From one end of North America to the other, it had gone like fire. Irenic in tone and intention it

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might be; but also within it was that which raised above party and above creed.

The people who saw and heard "A Play Without a Name" were able to fulfill Urban Meyer's prediction. A great world religion had found a miraculous birth in the theater. By the wave of an enchanter's wand the stage had become an inspired teacher who received the sanction of the few, and met the need of the many. The message it had to deliver was simple truth itself; yet the divine charm of its setting for haunted even the smallest soul with a magic glimpse of the Kingdom of the Something Else. The play's appeal was so remarkable that many who saw it simply lived for the time when they could see it again. It was a draught from the waters of Helicon; and, for them who drank of the Pierian spring, arose enchanted vistas of what the world might be if love and fellowship, works and faith, were allowed to remake it.

Urban Meyer had said that the world might be born again through the power of a great play. And in the first months of its production the signs were manifest that he was a true prophet. Through the wedding of insight with beauty, sympathy with truth, it reconciled factions, harmonized creeds.

Those who asked too much of life rejoiced as greatly in its sovereign humanity as those who asked

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too little. A divine simplicity spoke to all sorts of men. The pillar of the Church and the despiser of all religions, the over-good and the average person received from the well of a pure and infinite love, a new evidence, a new portent of the risen Christ.

It was said of those who saw it, that they were never quite the same afterward. An enchantment was laid upon the heart of man. Feeling, humor, imaginative truth, formed the basis of its triumph. A desire to do good was evoked, not because it was a sound spiritual investment or because others might be induced to do good to oneself, but it made of well-doing a natural act, like the eating of food or the drawing of breath.

Among the evidences of the new magic now at work in the world was a remarkable letter which Brandon received at the beginning of February. It said:

*Independence Theater,
New York,
January 24.*

DEAR MR. BRANDON:

I cannot tell you what an effect the play is making here. You will remember that, when I read it, I set my heart on the greatest production ever seen. And it was because the spirit of the play made me *feel* that I owed it to a world which had suffered me sixty-eight years, in which I had prospered exceedingly, and from which I have on the whole derived much happiness. Well, after

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many unforeseen trials, difficulties and disappointments, this aim has been achieved. Having at last brought together the cast I wanted, with great players in the chief parts, and having made sure of a noble interpretation, I opened the doors of this theater, for the first time in its history, at a democratic price, so that the downtown seamstress could have a glimpse of the Something Else, as well as her sister on Fifth Avenue.

That was not the act of a man of business, although it has proved a business action. I am not out to make money by this play. I don't want to make money out of it, because I feel, and this will make you smile, that it's like trafficking in the Word of God. But under the terms of the contract entered into between us on behalf of the unknown author, who I am sorry to learn from Mr. Pomfret is seriously ill, large sums are going to be earned by it in all parts of the world. In the course of the next few months it will be played here and in Canada, by at least fifty stock companies. Next month I start for Stockholm, in order to produce it at the state theater. Christiansen, the poet, has prepared a version which I believe to have true inspiration. As you know, his reputation has European significance, and several of his German friends, among them the Director of the National Theater, will be present at the first performance. The fame of the play has already reached Europe, and Christiansen hopes for an early performance in Berlin. Arrangements are also being made in Paris, Rome, Petrograd, and Vienna, and in the course of a few months I expect versions of it to appear in all these places. Van Roon's beautiful version for the Hague, Hjalmar's for Christiania and Ximena's for Madrid, will be produced within a few weeks, so you see that the grass is not growing under our feet.

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There is every reason to look for great developments. It is hoped that the play may be a means of keeping open the door for civilization.

Believe me, dear Mr. Brandon,
Very sincerely yours,

URBAN MEYER.

P. S. I have just heard that the play has been awarded the Nobel Prize for peace. Christiansen writes that he has been asked to go to England and offer an address to the author on behalf of the Scandinavian Government.

U. M.

XLII

THE blinds were down at the vicarage. Prince, whose stealthy grace of movement was that of the perfect parlor maid, walked with more than usual delicacy. Her master had not slept in his bed for two nights. Miss Edith was working in a Paris hospital, and news had come from France that Mr. Tom was gone.

In the absence of Miss Edith, Prince felt herself to be the most authoritative female in that diminished household; and she was much concerned for her master, whom she adored. It was the nature of Prince to adore. In her face was the look of stern beauty worn by nearly every Englishwoman of her generation. It seemed but yesterday that she had ordered a wedding dress she was never to wear, because "her boy," a lusty towheaded young sergeant of the Sussex Regiment, had gone to sleep on the Somme.

Ever since the telegram had come from the War Office, the vicar had not been himself. But his first act had been to go up to town for the day, and comfort and advise the brave girl whose three bairns would

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never see their father again. It had called for a great effort, for he was stunned by the sense of loss. To a father, the first-born is a symbol. And there is nothing to replace an eldest son in the heart of a lonely man who lives in the memory of a great happiness. He had only to look at gifted, rare-spirited Tom to see the mother, to watch the play of her features, to behold the light of her eyes.

Of his four children he had never disguised the fact that Tom was the fine flower. Like many men of rather abrupt mental limitation, the vicar had, at bottom, a reverence for a good brain. This boy had been given a talent, and many a time had the father amused himself with the pious fancy that the brilliant barrister, of whom much was predicted, would be the second Lord Chancellor of his name and blood.

On the third morning of the news, as the vicar sat at breakfast solitary and without appetite, Prince brought him a letter. It bore a service postmark. It was from Somewhere in France, and it said:

1st Metropolitan Regiment.

DEAR SIR:

It is with the deepest regret that I have to inform you that Captain Perry-Hennington was killed on the 5th inst. His loss falls very heavily indeed upon his brother officers and the men of his Regiment. I will not attempt to say how much he meant to all ranks, for no man

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could have been more looked up to, or more generally beloved. All knew him for what he was, a good soldier, a true Christian, a great gentleman. He was in the act of writing you a letter (which I inclose) when word was brought to him that a man of another battalion, mortally hit, had asked for Captain Perry-Hennington. He went out at once, across the danger zone to a communication trench, where the poor fellow lay, but half way he was caught by a shell and killed instantly. If it was his turn, it was the end he would have asked for, and the end those who loved him would have asked for him. Assuring you of the Regiment's deepest sympathy in your great loss,

I am, very sincerely yours,
G. H. ARBUTHNOT,
Lieutenant Colonel.

Inclosed in the letter was a scrap of paper on which was written:

DEAREST DAD:

I fear the will is going. For nearly three years it has been my continual prayer to Our Father in Heaven that the mind be not taken before the soul is released, but if——"

As soon as the vicar had read these strange words he rose unsteadily from the table, went into the study and locked the door. Then kneeling under a favorite portrait of the boy's mother, he offered a humble prayer of thanks. A little afterward, unable to bear the restraint of four walls, he went out, hatless, into

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the sunlight of a very perfect day. Very slowly, yet hardly knowing what he did, he passed through the vicarage gate, and turned into the steep and narrow path leading to the village green. Half way up some familiar lines of Milton began to ring oddly in his ears:

Methought I saw my late espoused saint
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave.

And they were accompanied by an odd phrase he had once heard on the lips of Gervase Brandon. In the height of a forgotten controversy, Brandon had said that "for him the image of the spectrum had altered." As the phrase now came to the vicar he caught a glimpse of its meaning. Somehow he perceived a change of mental vision. At that moment he seemed to walk closer with God than he had ever walked; at that moment he was in more intimate communion with an adored wife, a beloved son. Even the sweet upland air and the flow of the sun through the leaves had a new quality. The feeling of personal loss was yielding to praise and thanksgiving; never had the vicar been so sure of that loving mercy upon which his boy had implicitly relied.

Filled with a new, a greater life, he found himself, without knowing it, on the village green. And then

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in a flash, as he came to the priest's stone, the angle of the spectrum shifted again. He was pierced by the recognition of a great presence. A voice, faint, far off, yet clear as the sound of flowing water, touched his ear with such ecstasy that he looked around to see whence it came. A sky gloriously burnished with the presence of God alone could have winged it; and as he looked up, came the words: "And, lo, the heavens opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him."

Thrilled by a joy which was half fear, the vicar leaned against the stone. And as he did so a rush of wild thoughts swept his mind like a tide. His eyes grew dark as he saw again a summer twilight and a frail figure of fantasy kneeling upon the spot to which he was now rooted. In a series of pictures, a terrible and strange scene was reënacted. A motor car glided stealthily past the door of the widow's cottage; it came round the bend of the road; as it stopped by the edge of the green, two heavy somber men descended from it, and from his own base ambush, but a few yards off, he saw them cautiously approach the kneeling figure.

Again he was the witness of the acts and the words that passed. He saw the figure rise as they came up; he heard the greeting of the calm, expecting voice:

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"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Again he saw the grim procession move across the grass, he saw the upward gesture to the God in the sky, which at the moment had revolted him; and then he saw the car stealthily turn the bend in the track and fade among the dark-glowing gorse.

A nausea came upon the vicar. Sick with sudden terror, he realized what he had done. To the fate which his own boy could not face and had been allowed, as a crowning mercy, to escape, he had himself condemned a fellow creature without a hearing, and perhaps against the weight of evidence. By what authority had he immured a fellow citizen in a living tomb? By what authority had he denied the first and highest of all sanctions to a human soul? The doom that his own poor lad, with all his heroism, had not the superhuman courage to meet, this defenseless villager had embraced in the spirit of a martyr and a saint.

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Again the vicar saw him rise from his knees, and with a wan but happy smile go forth to a fate by comparison with which the grave was very kind. Overborne by a sudden passion of illogical remorse, the vicar sank to his own knees by the stone, on a spot

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bare of grass, the fruit, perhaps, of John Smith's many kneelings in many bygone years. Broken and bereaved, a lone animal wounded and terrified, he humbly asked that he might be allowed to meet his wife and his boy in Heaven.

The vicar rose from his knees. Faint and chill of heart, he hardly cared to look up for a visible answer to his prayer. He was now in outer darkness. For Thomas Perry-Hennington there was no descent of the Spirit from the hard sky, glowing with strange beauty. He listened wildly, yet he could only hear the water flowing by Burkett's mill.

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The living words were spurring him to frenzy. But the soul of man, naked and shivering, helpless and lonely, recoiled upon itself with the fear that there was none of whom to seek forgiveness. For one, Thomas Perry-Hennington, there was no means of access to the Father. By an idolatrous act, setting the state above the Highest, he had severed all communication. In bigotry, arrogance, imperfect faith he had betrayed the Master; in pharisaic blindness he had crucified the Son of Man.

Thoughts like these, coming at this moment, were too much for human endurance; in that direction

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madness lay. A little while he stood by the stone, trying to hold on to the thing he called "himself." And then a strange desire came upon him to crave the light of one whom he had traduced. He dare not set his act higher, he dare not state his treason in other terms; at that moment the will itself forbade his so doing. An issue was now upon him which reason could not accept. To the inner eye within the mind itself all was darkness, but looking now with the ear alone he thought he heard a far, faint voice in the infinite stellar spaces, a voice telling him to go at once to Wellwood.

Suddenly he turned and trailed off back to the vicarage, like some hapless, hunted thing of the fields, that flees too madly for hope of escape. As he half ran down the steep path, his white face gleaming in the sun, he began to repeat mechanically, in order still to keep in touch with the central forces:

Methought I saw my late espoused saint
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave.

By the time he had reached the middle of the lane, it came to him that he was obeying his wife's voice.

Turning in at the vicarage gate he called across the privet to the ancient Hobson to leave his roots, and go and put the harness on old Alice.

XLIV

VIA Grayfield, Easing and Chettleford the distance to Wellwood was nearly twenty miles.

He might train from Brombridge, but the service was bad and there would be three miles to walk at the end. So he decided that old Alice should take him to Grayfield, and then he would ask Whymper to lend him his car.

But long before he came to Grayfield he felt that this could not be. At that moment his old Magdalen friend was the last person in the universe he desired to meet. If he had now to face his kind it must be some other. Thus, as the stately chimneys and fine gables of the Manor house, rising proudly behind an enchanted copse of fern and Canterbury bells, came into view, he urged old Alice past them at her best pace and on to the Chequers, Grayfield's model public house. Its landlord, Hickman, a civil, obliging fellow, was known to the vicar, who in this dilemma was very glad of his help. It was not fair to ask the full journey of poor old Alice.

He was able to exchange her temporarily for the

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landlord's young mare. But in the process he had to submit to an ordeal that he would have given much to be spared.

"I see, sir, in the *Advertiser*," said Hickman, as he gave the ostler a hand in the inn yard, "that the Captain's gone. My boy went the same day. He was not in the Captain's lot, but I happen to know that he thought there was no one like him. He was such a gentleman, and he had a way with him that had a rare power over young chaps."

The vicar could not answer the honest fellow, whose voice failed suddenly and whose eyes were full of tears. But he held out his hand very simply, and Hickman, his tears now falling softly, like those of a child, took it.

"Excuse me, sir. Bill was my all. You see, I buried the wife in the spring. Things are at a dead end for me now."

The vicar, unable to speak, offered his hand again.

All at once Hickman took him firmly by the coat-sleeve and led him a dozen paces away from the ostler. "Excuse the great freedom, sir"—the big, not over-bright fellow's whisper was excessive in its humility—"but, as a minister of the Gospel, there's one question I'd like to ask you."

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Mr. Perry-Hennington shuddered at the perception of what was coming.

"The only hope for a chap like me is that I'll meet the wife and the boy in Heaven. Otherwise, I'm at a dead end as you might say. As one man to another, what chance do you think there is?"

The vicar grew cold at the heart.

"Of course, I'm not a churchgoer; I am not a religious man or anything of that kind. My father wasn't. I've always tried to go straight, keep sober, pay my way and so on, but of course, I've never taken Communion or read the Bible or done anything to curry favor. That's not my nature. Still, I reckon myself a fairish, decentish chap; and on Sunday evening, after the service, I went round to talk to our vicar here, Mr. Pierce."

"Yes." Mr. Perry-Hennington gave an eager gasp. "That was very wise. What did he say to you?" His lips could hardly shape the question.

"Why, sir, he said that a Christian couldn't doubt for a moment that one day he would be with his wife and children in Heaven."

"Mr. Pierce said that!"

"He did. And I told him I didn't pretend to be a Christian and I asked him if he thought I had left it too late."

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"Yes?"

"Well, sir, he said it was never too late to be a Christian. And he gave me a prayer book—he's a very nice gentleman—and told me to take it home and read it."

"Yes?"

"I've tried to read it, sir, but to be quite honest, I don't feel that I shall ever be much of a Christian."

"Well, Hickman—" suddenly Mr. Perry-Hennington found his voice—"always try to remember this: Jesus Christ came to us here in order that you might be with your dear wife and your dear boy in Heaven, and—and—we have His pledged Word—and we must believe in that."

"But how is a chap to believe what he can't prove?"

"We must have faith—we must all have faith."

"All very well, sir," said Hickman dourly, "but suppose He has promised more than He can perform?"

"In what way? How do you mean?"

"According to the Bible He was to come again, but as far as I can make out there doesn't seem much sign of Him yet."

Mr. Perry-Hennington was silent a moment and then he took one of the landlord's large hands in both of his own and said in an abrupt, half grotesque, wholly illogical way, "My dear friend, we are all members one of another. It is our duty to hope for the

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best—our duty to believe that the best will happen. And as he turned aside, he added with another curious change of voice, which he could not have recognized as belonging to himself, "You see, we are all in the same boat."

Saying these words, the vicar climbed into his trap with almost the stagger of a drunken man. He hardly knew what he said or what he did, but as soon as the mare was out of the inn yard it came upon him that he had to go to Wellwood, and that the way to get there was through Easing and Chettleford.

Why at that particular moment that particular place should be his destination he didn't quite know, unless it was in obedience to a voice he had heard in the sky. A modern man, whose supreme desire was to take reason for his guide in all things, even if the vows of his faith forced him to accept the supernatural in form and sum, he feared in this hour to apply it too rigidly.

As the publican's mare went steadily forward along the winding, humid lanes of a woodland country, a feeling of hopelessness came upon him. What did he expect to do when he got to the end of his journey? Such a question simply admitted of no answer. It was not to be faced by Thomas Perry-Hennington on

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his present plane of being. The logic of the matter could not be met.

That was the case, no doubt, but a compromise was equally impossible. Something would have to happen. Either he must go forward or he must go back. A soul in strange, terrible torment passed unseen and unseeing through the tiny hamlet of Easing and on and on up a steep hill and then down through a long valley of trees and a gloom of massively beautiful furze country. There was not a ripple of wind in the tense air, and in the early afternoon it grew very dark, with an occasional growl of thunder over the far hills. On the outskirts of Chettleford it began to rain in large slow drops; and as his sweating face perceived the soft, cool splash he half dared to take it as the explicit kindness of Heaven. Upon the wings of that thought came the automatic intrusion into his mind of the words:

Methought I saw my late espoused saint
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave.

And with them came the strange fancy that these tears out of Heaven were those of his wife and his boy.

A mile beyond Chettleford, at the dark edge of a wood, the sudden fear struck him that the soul of Thomas Perry-Hennington was about to enter unend-

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ing night. A recollection dread and spectral, which might have been Dante or the far distant ages of the past, engulfed him swiftly and completely. It was impossible to turn back now or he would have done so.

The narrow road grew darker and darker as it wound under the heavy, rain-pattered canopy of the wood. Earth and sky were without form, and void. He lost touch with time and place; he began to lose touch with his own identity. He only knew that Thomas Perry-Hennington was his name and that his destination was Wellwood Asylum.

The rain grew heavier, but there was no comfort in it now. He was already far beyond any kind of physical aid. A grisly demon was in him, urging him onward to his doom. His soul's reaction to it was beyond pity and terror. Quite suddenly, and long before he expected to see them, the heavy iron gates of the asylum were before him. At the sound of wheels an old man, very bent and grim, whom in the wet half-light he almost took for Charon, came slowly out of his lodge and fitted a key to the lock.

XLV

THE vicar and his trap passed through the gates of Wellwood and along a short drive, flanked by wet bushes of rhododendron to the main entrance. In a voice not at all like his own he said to a heavy, rather brutal-looking man who opened one of the doors, "Mr. Perry-Hennington to see Dr. Thorp."

He was admitted at once to a dim, somber interior, and shown into a small, stuffy waiting room in which he could hardly breathe. It was perhaps a relief to find himself quite alone, but in a very short time the doctor came to him.

The two men were known to each other. It was not Mr. Perry-Hennington's first visit to Wellwood; and from time to time they had sat together on various committees affecting the social welfare of the county.

The vicar's state of mind did not allow him to give much attention to Dr. Thorp, otherwise he could hardly have failed to notice that the chief medical officer of the establishment was in a state of suppressed excitement.

"I am particularly glad to see you, Mr. Perry-Hen-

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nington," he said. "I am afraid we are about to lose one of our patients under remarkable and tragic circumstances. He has not asked for the sacrament to be administered, but now you are so providentially here, I have no doubt he will welcome it if he is still able to receive it."

Dr. Thorp paused, but the vicar did not speak.

"It is our poor dear friend, John Smith. For months he has been slowly dying. But the end is now at hand. And it comes in very singular circumstances."

Again Dr. Thorp paused, again the vicar did not speak.

"I will tell you what they are. Our dear friend, in the course of his stay among us, wrote a stage play. It was given by him to Mr. Brandon, who gave it to Mr. Urban Meyer, the great American impresario, who has caused it to be played all over the world. And its success has been so extraordinary that it has been awarded the Nobel Prize for peace. But perhaps you know all this?"

The vicar shook his head.

"The whole story seems incredible," the doctor went on. "But there it is. Further, I am informed that Dr. Kurt Christiansen, the great Scandinavian poet and thinker is coming here this afternoon to present an

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address on behalf of his Government. And he is to be accompanied by Mr. Sigismund Prosser, C.B., representing the Royal Academy of Literature, by Mr. Brandon, representing our own Government, and by a representative of the press.

"Of course, Mr. Perry-Hennington, I needn't say that not only are the circumstances very unusual, they are also extremely difficult and embarrassing. The first intimation of this arrangement was from the Home Office, saying that out of regard for the activities of a neutral Power, our Government lent its sanction; and that if the patient was able to receive this act of homage it was felt to be in the public interest that he should do so. But at the same time it was pointed out that it would be a further public advantage if the distinguished visitor was not enlightened as to the nature of this establishment, or the circumstances in which the play had been written. Well, I mentioned the matter at once to our poor friend, and I was able to reply that, although the patient was extremely weak and his death perhaps a question of a few days, he would gladly receive the deputation.

"On the strength of that assurance the arrangements have gone forward. The deputation is due at Wellwood in rather less than half an hour, but I grieve to say that our poor dear, but evidently greatly

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gifted, friend, whose loss we shall all mourn deeply, is now losing consciousness."

"Losing consciousness." The vicar repeated the words as if he hardly understood them.

"Yes." The doctor spoke in a matter-of-fact tone. "It may or may not be a final phase. There may be a slight rally which will enable him to receive the honor about to be paid him. On the other hand it is almost too much to hope for now. Every kind of stimulant has been already administered, but the action of the heart is very feeble and I am sadly afraid that the deputation is making its journey in vain."

"Am I too late?" gasped the vicar.

"Not to do your office, I hope. The patient may still be able to receive the sacrament."

"May I see him?"

"I shall be very glad for you to do so."

"Let me go to him at once," gasped the vicar wildly.

XLVI

HIS eyes growing dark, the vicar asked for a prayer book. When this had been procured, the doctor led him through a maze of dismal corridors to a small door at the extreme end of a long passage.

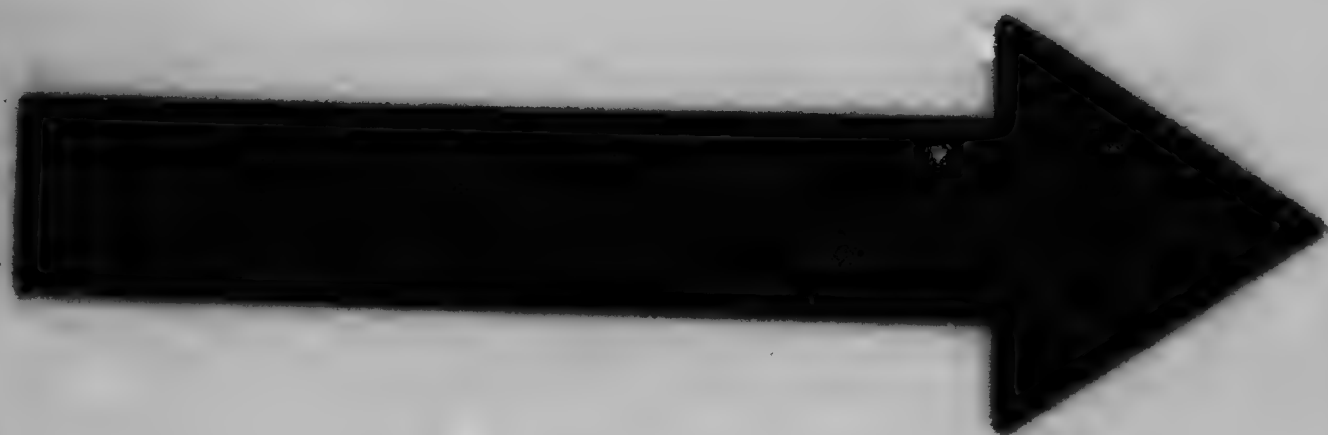
At the doctor's gentle tap it was opened by the head attendant.

"Any change, Boswell?" whispered the doctor.

There was no change it appeared.

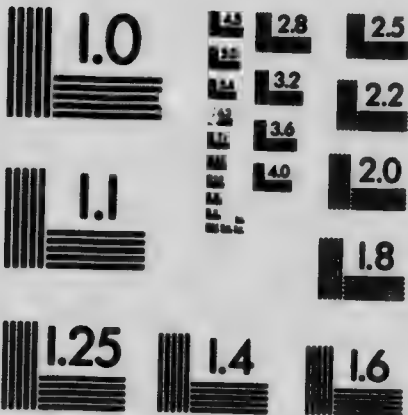
At first the vicar stood irresolute on the threshold of the cell. His manner made it clear that he desired to be alone with the dying man, and in a few moments the doctor and the attendant went away. The vicar, grasping his prayer book like a staff, then passed in alone, and the heavy door swung to behind him with a self-closing click which locked it securely.

The room had only a bedstead. It was very hard to see in that night of time through which the vicar was now looking. Not daring to approach the bed, he stood hopelessly by the door, naked in spirit, faint of soul. He could neither speak nor move. There



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was not a sound in the room, nor any light. He stood alone.

He stood alone and without any kind of power; he could neither hear nor see; he was in a void in which time was awfully revealed in a new notation. Broken with fear, he began slowly to lose apperception.

How long he remained solitary there was no means of knowing, but at last he heard a voice in the room. It was hardly more than a sigh, yet so strangely familiar and expected was the sound that the vicar knew it at once for the voice of One.

"You did as your light directed. Faithful servant, kiss me."

Transfigured with a wild emotion, like music and wine in his heart, the vicar moved to the bed. He fell on his knees, and flung his arms round the form which lay there. He pressed wild kisses upon the luminous face. At the contact of his lips, the image of the spectrum altered and Truth itself was translated to a higher value. Then he seemed to realize that he was holding in his arms a heroic son——.

"My darling boy!" he whispered. "My darling boy!"

Again he rained kisses on the upturned face.

He suddenly perceived that a third presence was by his side. He knew it for the happy mother and be-

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loved wife. Again the image of the spectrum altered. He was born again. There came to him with new, intenser meaning the doctrine of the Trinity and through it the mystic union of husband, wife and child in the Father's Love.

After a further lapse of time which was measureless, the ecstasy of the human father was terminated by the sound of a key turning in the door of the room. Instantly the spell was broken and he realized that he was fondling the face of a corpse.

The vicar rose from his knees as the doctor entered the room. He stood by the bed, shivering now with strange happiness, while the doctor lifted the hand and looked at the face of his patient.

"I was afraid," said the doctor in a hushed voice, "that he would not be able to receive the deputation. Dear fellow! He is now with the souls in whom he believed."

"And who believed in Him," said the vicar in a tone that the doctor could hardly recognize.

"Yes, there were souls who believed in him," said the doctor in a matter-of-fact voice which had a kind of gentle indulgence. "There must have been. More than one of our poor old men here died with his name on their lips. You would hardly believe what an influence he had among us. We shall miss him very

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much. In his way he was a true saint, a real teacher, and he has left this place better than he found it."

"If only he could have received the homage that awaited him," the vicar whispered.

"Yes, if only he could have done so! But it is written otherwise. Still, we all feel that a very remarkable honor has been paid to one of our inmates. By the way, isn't it Aristotle—or is it Plato—who says that it is a part of probability that many improbabilities will happen?"

XLV

AS the vicar and the doctor left John Smith's cell, there came out of the deep shadows of the long corridor a figure, old, forlorn, very infirm. With a haunted look this rather grotesque creature shuffled forward, and fixing tragic eyes upon the doctor's face muttered in an alien tongue:

"He is risen. He is risen."

The doctor reproved him sharply. "Why, Goethe, what in fortune's name are you doing here! Go at once to your own side and don't let me see you here again. Strict instructions were given that none of the patients were to be seen in the west wing just now. I must look into this. Go at once to your own side."

The old man slunk away, still muttering softly, "He is risen. He is risen."

The doctor was obviously annoyed by the incident. "Gross carelessness on the part of someone," he said. "The deputation is already due, and the Home Office desires us in the special and quite unprecedented circumstances of the case to present as normal an appearance as we can. In other words, it doesn't want

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representatives of our own and foreign governments to be welcomed by a parcel of lunatics. That will not help anybody; besides, as the Home Office says, it is desirable that no slur should be cast on the profession of literature."

"And on the memory of the Master," whispered the vicar in his hushed voice.

"Quite so. I fully agree. The dear fellow! And to think he was able to win a prize of seven thousand pounds, not to mention the many thousands his work is earning all over the world, from which, by the way, deserving charities are benefiting."

"Did he know that his work was producing these large sums?"

"Oh, yes. And I think the knowledge gave him pleasure. But he never regarded a penny as his own. He left it to Mr. Brandon and myself—two just men I am proud to think he called us—to give back again, as he said, 'that which had been given to him, in the way likely to do the most good.'"

"He was quite selfless," said the vicar.

"Absolutely. And he is the only man I have known, or am ever likely to know, of whom that statement could be truly made. I have known good men, I have known men with high, forward-looking souls, but I have never known a man so near His model that if it

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had not existed already one almost felt that such a man must have created it. In fact, John Smith will stand out in my experience as the most remarkable case I have known. He believed until he became."

"As you say, he believed until he became. And he made a prophecy which he has lived to fulfill."

"What was the prophecy he made?"

"That he would heal the wounds of the world."

"I wonder, I wonder."

"Oh ye of little faith!" whispered the vicar. The tears that rose to his eyes were like the blood of his heart.

Hardly had Mr. Perry-Hennington spoken the words when both he and Doctor Thorp perceived a stir at the doors of the main entrance to the institution, now in view at the far end of the corridor along which they were passing. No more than a glance was needed to tell them that the deputation was in the act of arrival. Beyond the open doors, a large motor car and an imposing array of silk hats were clearly visible in the half-light of the wet afternoon.

As the doctor and the vicar came to the main entrance, several persons entered the building. Foremost of these were Gervase Brandon and a very noble-looking old man with snow-white hair and the eyes of a child. In one hand he carried his hat, in the other a

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large bunch of lilies held together with a broad ribbon of white satin.

"Dr. Thorp," said Brandon, with a happy and proud smile. "I have the great honor and privilege to present Dr. Kurt Christiansen, whose reputation has long preceded him. At the instance of a neutral government he has come to this country to pay in the name of humanity the world's homage to our dear friend."

Solemn but cordial bows were exchanged and then Dr. Thorp replied, "I grieve to have to tell you, sir, that our dear friend has already passed."

The childlike bearer of the lilies looked very simply into the doctor's eyes. "Dead," he said.

"But being dead liveth," said a tall clergyman from the background in a whispered tone of new authority.

There followed a moment of silence and constraint. And then it was very unexpectedly shattered by a wild appearance, grinning with strange joy and crying in an alien tongue, "He is risen! He is risen!"

Only the prompt intervention of Dr. Thorp prevented this figure of fantasy flinging its arms round the neck of Mr. Sigismund Prosser, C.B. An international incident of some magnitude was thus averted, for the representative of the Royal Academy of Liter-

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ature had recently said at a public meeting that "he had done with Goethe forever."

EPILOGUE

*Whitehall,
Friday.*

Strictly confidential.

DEAR BRANDON:

Your moving account of the proceedings at Wellwood Sanatorium was read at the Cabinet meeting this afternoon and you will be glad to know that the Lord Chamberlain is being advised to license the production of the Play in this country. In the present state of the public mind it is felt to be the best course to take. It is hoped that further questions will not arise in the House, otherwise it may be impossible to avoid an inquiry into all the circumstances of a most singular case, and this, I think you will agree, would be undesirable just now from every point of view.

Yours,
GEORGE SPEKE.

(1)